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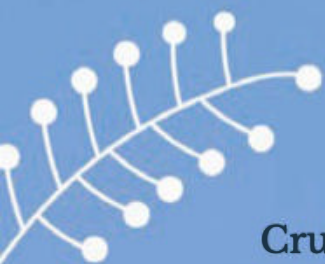
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# Karibu

**It is always fun talking to you**, our readers, but it has been especially so over the last couple of years. I love hearing what Africa means to you and how much you are looking forward to getting back. Conservationists, communities and safari operators all desperately need tourism to return to full strength, but each of us needs it too.

Travel is great for our mental health, and it is clear that immersing ourselves in Africa's wilderness in search of the wildlife we love so much is really, *really* important to each of us and something we crave more than ever.

Whatever the situation, let's hope you can find a way to get out to Africa as soon as possible. Put up with whatever protocols you have to, but make it happen – and make it count.

Our conversations have emphasised how passionate you are about your time on safari. They have shed light on how you like to travel, the questions you have when plotting your adventures, and the compromises you are faced with when tempted to cram in as much as you can. When time is precious, we value it so much more.

One reader is planning a return trip to Zimbabwe. She is keen to revisit places she has been previously with her father, yet excited about the prospect of exploring some of the parks she has read about since. It is clear she is going to need to make some tough decisions – and be at peace with the sacrifices she'll make. She will have to figure out what is most important to her, what exactly she most wants from the trip, and then tailor an itinerary that is most likely to give her the right balance.

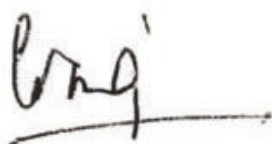
Discussions like this – and there have been several – sowed the seed for the theme of this issue.

We wondered if we could put together a collection of articles that might help you to navigate the planning process, regardless of whether you are looking forward to your first or your one thousandth (as another reader has done) game drive. We each approach our travels in our own way, but there are some principles that create a framework and can settle the mind through the process.

Furthermore, was there something we could offer that might enrich the experience once you are on the ground? That might enable you to have more success in finding the animals you have come to see and in getting the most out of it when you do?

We are blessed to have been able to draw on a wide network of experts who have shared their insight. We hope you will find something in these pages that will have an enduring impact on your future trips.

Please tell us what you think, and send us your own tips. We have shared some of your stories in these pages and will continue to include them in issues to come. We know your passion doesn't stop when you board the plane home – and nor should it. Write journals, take photos and share these as widely as you can when you get back. The more people who understand why we love this mad, beautiful, bountiful continent, the better.



**CRAIG RIX** PUBLISHER/EDITOR



**ON THE COVER** The elusive aardvark, photographed at Tswalu private game reserve, South Africa. An aardvark's footprint appears at the end of each feature in this issue.



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# SHADOW BOXING

**Whether or not you are a photographer,** there is much to be gained from spending time watching and studying animal behaviour, as it is only after animals become accustomed to your presence that they will start behaving naturally. Then it is possible to learn specific habits, such as the approximate time elephants will frequent a favoured waterhole. With this understanding, plus the nuances of the environment – such as light, time of day, background and weather – one is able to create or ‘make’ a great photo.

This photograph, taken in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park at dawn, reflects one of those impromptu or serendipitous moments that we are gifted occasionally. It is then that it’s necessary to think quickly and make fast decisions to ensure you get the best possible results. I had seen these two giraffes from a distance as they were ‘necking’, throwing up a dust storm in the process. I positioned myself to get a backlit shot of the animals against the rising sun and sought to minimise background distractions.

Their movement was creating a surreal scene: their shadows were being cast on the dust, forming a repetitive pattern, something I have not witnessed before. The giraffes took a breather when I captured this moment. I under-exposed slightly to avoid bleaching the highlights, and my 500mm lens was set at f/6.3, 1/320, ISO 200.

*Charlie Lynam*









# TIME WITH ELEPHANTS

**I often say that elephants are just like** humans, but even more so. They have everything we feel proud of as humans – empathy, trust, dignity, language, ability to think in the past, present and future, compassion – but elephants have none of the war, cruelty and inhumanity we exhibit daily.

One example is a time we were watching a herd of elephants drinking at a waterhole, and a baby fell and was suctioned into the mud. They rallied quickly and delegated duties: one to break the bank, another to trample a ramp, one to lift the baby from the mud with her tusks. Some of them kept the other youngsters from panicking, and the young bulls chased buffalo and impala away. Empathy, altruism, trust, intelligence, communication and planning were all demonstrated. When they could not manage and we had to step in to help, the herd was going crazy right up to the point that they understood we were trying to help. Then something magical happened: they quietened down and let us get on with it.

At the moment of freedom they greeted the baby, kept her close, touched her, comforted her... and then came within paces of us calmly, raised their trunks, sniffed at our muddy clothing, rumbled deep soft rumbles, and then slowly left. Trust.

Think also about their burial rituals, their excitement at each birth or, sadly, the deep emotional trauma they exhibit when people shoot them or steal their young for zoos. They know.

*Dereck Joubert*

CEO, GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION









# MOMENTS IN TIME

**Over the years that I have worked**

as a wildlife photographer, nature has taught me that being prepared and willing to photograph the unexpected can be very rewarding.

This image of an African skimmer illustrates this. It was taken on the Chobe River, where my objective was to photograph elephants in or near the water. On one of the days the elephants were nowhere near, but I stayed out, hoping a herd might come to drink in the late afternoon. The boat was spacious, which meant I was able to keep two camera and lens combinations set up and close to hand, so I wouldn't have to waste time changing lenses if a subject suddenly appeared. I also keep my cameras switched on, in Standby mode, and with a fast shutter speed as priority.

African skimmers can be difficult birds to photograph. Sometimes they fly quite fast, and they also have a buoyant way of flying, which means they can be challenging to keep in the viewfinder. But when they are actively skimming the water surface, their flight pattern smooths out and it is easier to follow.

I like to scan for birds like skimmers with my binoculars. Seeing them first at a distance allows me a few extra moments to start tracking them with my camera. Those extra seconds of bird in the viewfinder make it easier to compose well and to get the fast-moving subject in sharp focus.

For this shot, I had my Canon 5D Mark III set to ISO 800 to achieve a shutter speed of 1/5000sec at f6.3 and used the EF 500L f4 IS II lens.

*Grant Atkinson*



# WHY DO WE LOVE WILDLIFE?

What keeps us returning, time and again, to Africa in search of animals? What drives our desire to see all the more elusive species? By **Morgan Trimble**

**Y**ou know that scene in *Jurassic Park* where Doctors Grant and Sattler explore the island in Jeeps? To a swelling John Williams score, the camera pans from gaping jaws to astonished eyes as the scientists first encounter living dinosaurs. That's how I felt the first time I saw wild elephants. We students sat squished in the back of a Land Rover Defender, our sweaty legs tangled between bench seats, as we travelled a dirt track in Laikipia, Kenya. Through the dusty rear glass, I glimpsed a herd of grey behemoths – impossibly large, improbably graceful – among picturesque umbrella thorns. In that moment, childhood nature magazines and documentaries became real. I wouldn't have been more awestruck if an actual brachiosaurus had plodded across the plain.

What is it about wildlife that so captivates us? Why do wild encounters stir powerful emotions and memories? What are we really seeking on safari?

Biologist E.O. Wilson used the term "biophilia" to describe our innate, mostly subconscious, tendency to seek connections with Earth's lifeforms. He theorised that nature, unlike man-made environments, stimulates our senses to fully engage us. Biophilia, he said, is the essence of our humanity, binding us to all living species. It's why we hang bird feeders and plant flowers and

why woodland strolls soothe us. If biophilia is part of our biology, then watching wildlife in Africa transports us to its ancient source.

People spend vastly less time outside than did prior generations. We're more disconnected from nature than ever, so wildlife encounters are all the more powerful. Communing with wildlife evokes conflicting sensations. We are just another humble member of the animal kingdom, but also something "other", with profound responsibility. No wildlife encounter captures this uncanny sentiment like sitting in on a mountain gorilla family's breakfast. Weary moms eye wrestling youngsters as the silverback chomps greens. So familiar, yet so exotic. We love and value wildlife as something precious that we can't manufacture. Wildlife is rare, getting rarer, and to experience it feels an enormous privilege.

Wildlife appreciation stems, in part, from culture and family traditions. Kids that spend time outdoors with parents or grandparents are more likely to become wildlife lovers. Culture may also explain why

of environment versus genetics on dog ownership. Surprisingly, genetics played a dominant role, much more so than shared upbringing. Apparently, the evolutionary forces humanity wielded to domesticate animals left reciprocal traces in our own genes. Although owning dogs and enjoying wildlife aren't the same, we wildlife lovers might have been born this way.

Certainly though, experience and education can ignite and deepen passion for wildlife. For many, the thrill of seeing iconic safari mammals expands over time to encompass species assumed to be less charismatic. Reptiles, amphibians, insects and even plants become fascinating. I used to think birds were boring. Yet the more time I spent with birders, the more I learned and began to mirror their enthusiasm. Now birds dazzle me. I would just as well go bird watching, puzzling over IDs of unfamiliar species, as ticking the 'big five' in an afternoon.

Perhaps this birding affliction hinges on my brain's reward system. A pleasurable dopamine hit accompanies searching for,

*We love and value wildlife as something precious that we can't manufacture. Wildlife is rare, getting rarer, and to experience it feels an enormous privilege*

we seek iconic species like elephants, lions and leopards on safari. We're steeped in their significance through storytelling, art, and symbolism. Of course, Wilson would argue animals' place in culture is down to our biophilic evolution.

Yet, many people don't care for animals, preferring the concrete jungle to the Congo rainforest. As conservationists, it's tempting to ascribe apathy to ignorance. If biophilia is natural, what is bio-apathy? Recently, researchers studied dog ownership among twins – some identical sets with identical genomes and some fraternal, who shared just half. By assuming twin pairs had similar upbringings, the scientists unravelled the effects

and then finding, something serendipitous. We all harbour these primal hunting instincts of our ancestors. To survive, they depended on sustained motivation to seek and find food – whether fruit, fungus, furry or feathered. Most modern safari-goers carry cameras, not weapons, but the thrill of the chase still permeates safari culture. Ancient hunters surely took pride in their hard-won skills. Likewise, we wildlife enthusiasts earn satisfaction by learning to find, identify and, often, photograph animals. A tick on a checklist or photo memento replaces the hunting trophy and caloric reward.

On safari, campfire conversations centre on guests' daily sightings or highlights of past trips. Rarity, danger potential, and



the thrilling pinnacles in the theatre of life and death – courtship, births, territorial battles, kills – earn implicit bragging points. We treasure these wild encounters long into the future. This fondness for reminiscing and sharing contributes to our love for wildlife. I've enjoyed visits to celebrated museums and monuments of human ingenuity across the world, but I'm surprised by the nebulousness of those memories. In contrast, thinking back to special wildlife encounters elicits the same visceral awe I originally experienced. Precious details flood back: the sounds, the smells, the companions, the emotions.

Scientists have identified three factors that render experiences memorable: involvement, engagement, and 'outstandingness' compared to everyday norms. Is it any wonder watching wildlife on safari captures our imaginations and memories? Searching for sightings and reawakening primal instincts ensures we are involved. Unfettered from phones and routine work and domestic distractions, we are unusually engaged. And, for most of us, few experiences are more outstanding than watching wild drama unfold across breathtaking landscapes.

In an ethnographic study of wildlife tourists, Susanna Curtin discovered what makes certain wildlife encounters especially memorable and meaningful. Spontaneity – the uncertainty and anticipation of finding a quarry as well as the surprise and luck of chancing upon the unexpected – ranks highly. So, too, does wildlife in mass numbers – hello, Great Migration – or spectacular diversity. Closeness, one-on-one interactions, eye contact and a sense of interaction all create memorable encounters. In particular, the thrill of first-time sightings tends to stick, explaining my elephants of Laikipia.

In the moment, wildlife encounters are exhilarating and pleasurable. We carry these feelings with us as memories to cherish for a lifetime, which in turn, keeps us coming back for more.



CHARLIE LYNAM



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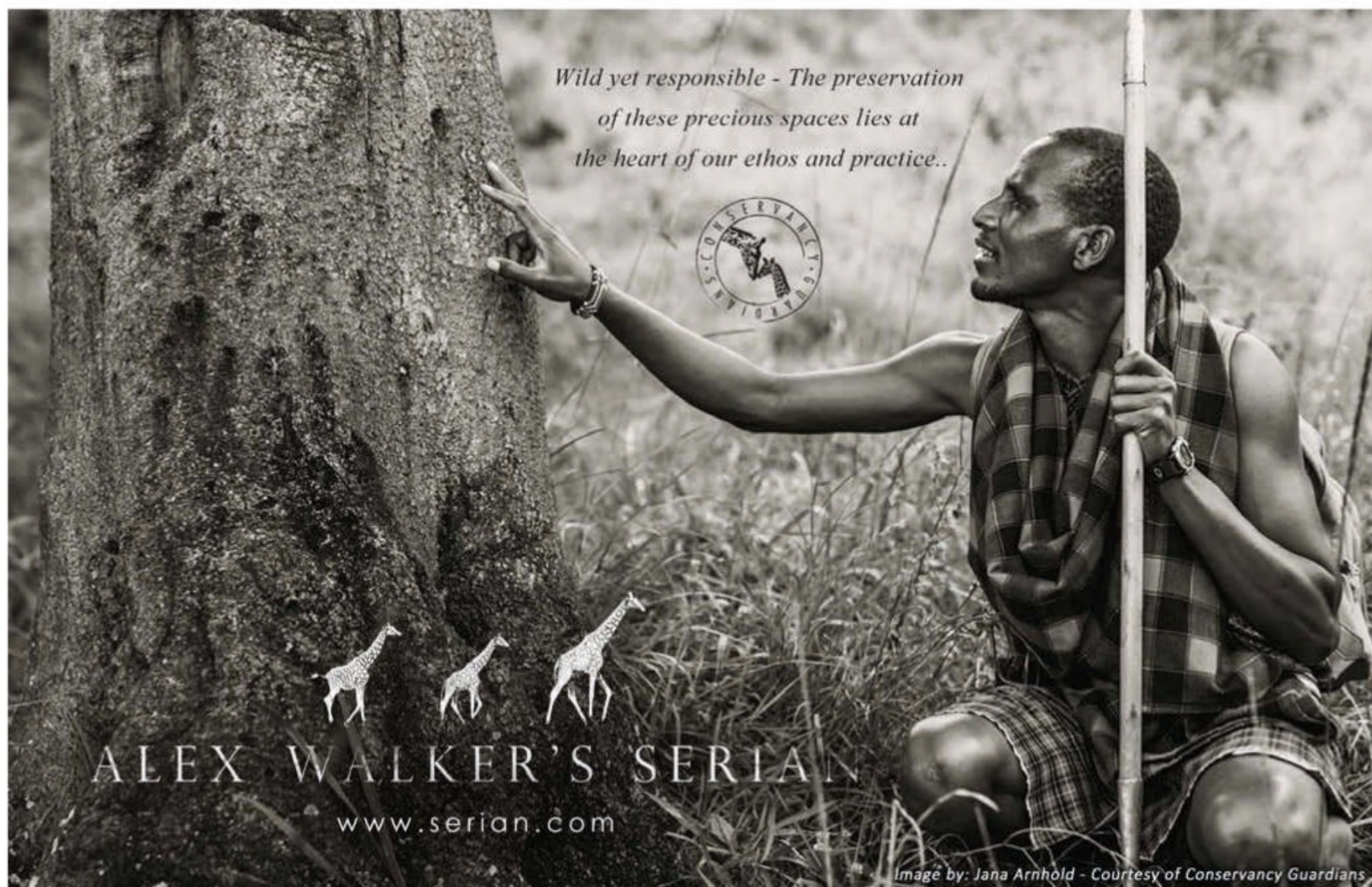
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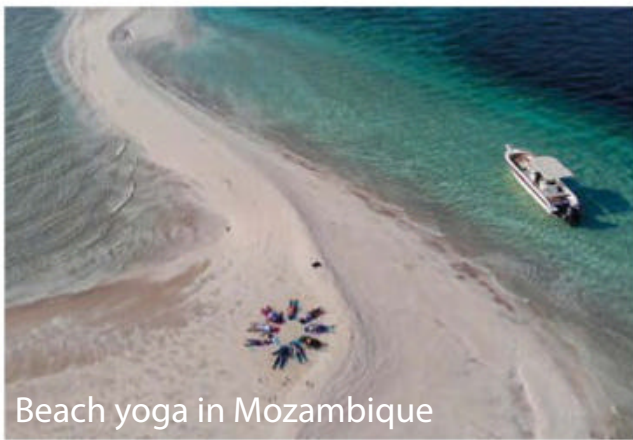


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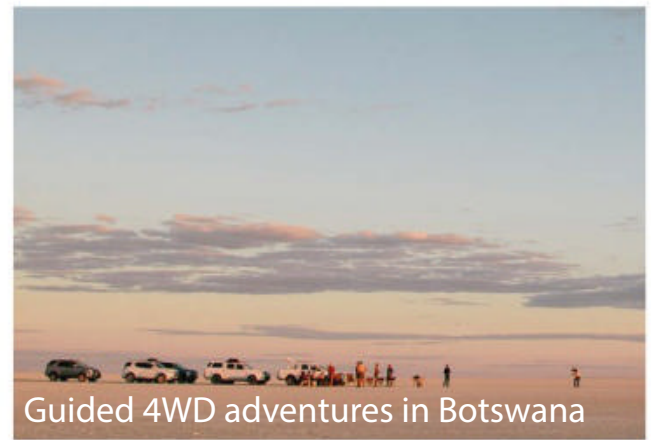




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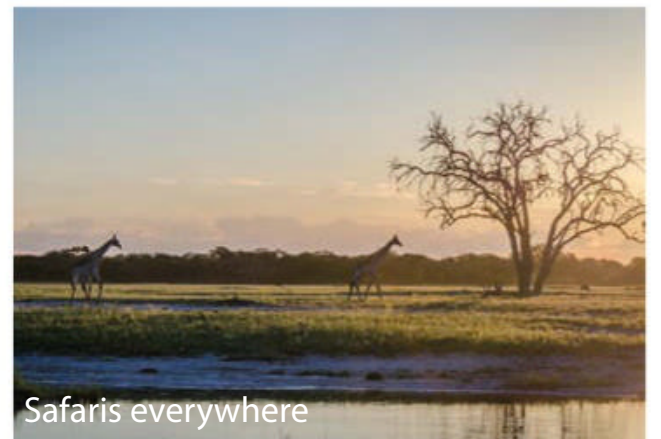
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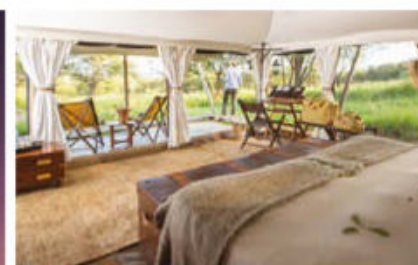
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# PLANNING

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**So, you want to go to Africa to see wildlife?** While every safari is rewarding, you'll greatly improve your chances of meeting your expectations by considering some practicalities before you start booking flights. The decisions you make at the outset will influence the whole trip. Planning can and should be a fun and exciting experience, whether you are plotting your first safari or your fiftieth. We hope this section will help you get started. *Safari njema!* →

**Laying foundations:**  
A southern masked weaver making final preparations before the kids arrive, Kruger National Park

CORREIA PATRICE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO





# THE STARTING POINT

What sort of safari is for you? We look at the questions you should think about before you book

**A**s every regular traveller knows, the key to a successful safari is in the planning. And it helps to have a plan for that planning. Before you consider consulting a safari expert, or Google, you need to ask yourself a few questions in order to gain a clearer idea of what you would like to get from your trip. Understanding your hopes will help immensely with your planning. And while choosing the destination may seem like the most pressing issue to anyone planning a safari, “Where should I go?” is invariably the last thing you should ask.

There’s no magic formula – each of you will have your own interests – but here are a few pointers to get you started.

## **Q IS THERE A CERTAIN SPECIES OR EVENT YOU WANT TO SEE?**

“This is the first thing we ask,” says Bill Given of The Wild Source. Armed with an answer to this question, the framework for your planning can immediately take shape. For example, if you are an experienced safari-goer, you may want to focus on observing certain animal behaviours while, as a first-timer, you may be more eager to see as many iconic species as you can.

Debbie Addison of Wild Frontiers agrees. The starting point for us, she says, is: “What do you want to see? Once we have this, we can guide you to the right area at the correct time of year.”

Knowing the types of animal you want to see is paramount, says Brad Mitchell of Rhino Africa. “It allows your travel expert to narrow down destinations that can make these sightings most likely.”

Dan Free of Wildlife Worldwide suggests digging a little deeper. “Are you hoping to see or photograph a specific species or wildlife event, or are you simply looking to spend time in a particular environment and see what you encounter?” he asks.

Letting your travel planner know the extent of your interests – such as photography or birding – is another key

element. “Are you a serious photographer, an amateur or a happy snapper with a phone?” asks Addison. “Or, if birding is your thing, are you just interested, a twitcher or a very serious birder? The latter may require a specialist local guide to find certain birds, for example.”

## **Q WHEN DO YOU WANT TO GO?**

Wildlife populations migrate, congregate and mate according to the seasons. Parks can burst with animals at certain times of the year and be eerily quiet at others. Some reserves may be inaccessible during the rains. There is always great wildlife somewhere; you just need to match the right region to your travel dates.

Think about what is more important, “the date of travel or seeing a specific species”, says Addison.

Linked with timings and your wildlife ambitions is the destination. Again, you need to be clear on which is most critical. If it’s the place, you shouldn’t think “I’d like to go on safari in Kenya this March.” Rather, you’d be better off asking: “I’d like to go on safari this March; where is wildlife best at that time?”

## **Q HOW LONG DO YOU WANT TO GO FOR?**

The duration of your safari will either limit or extend the range of activities available to you. For instance, a short trip will mean you’ll have to focus on a destination that has a high density of attractions. With more time, you’ll be able to consider a combination of locations or enjoy the opportunity to move at a slower pace.

“Think about how fast-paced/adventurous you would like your itinerary to be,” says Free. “Do you want to spend longer in one location or to experience as much as possible in the time you have in the country?”

## **Q HOW MUCH DO YOU WANT TO SPEND?**

“This is often an awkward question,” says Addison. “To get around this [rather than ask ‘What’s your budget?’], we ask ‘Where have you stayed previously or in what style of accommodation have you stayed?’”

The size of your budget doesn’t really prevent you from visiting most areas – it will simply change how you experience them. Your budget will determine the range of accommodation and transportation you are open to, and what combination of activities you can allow yourself.

But note, there are some costs you cannot avoid, such as park fees. In some countries, you may find this restricts your time in some parks. Be aware, though, that money buys you more than just a soft bed; it can also land you a →

### **Outward bound:**

A baby hyena emerges from its den, Kruger National Park









## PLANNING KEY QUESTIONS

top-notch guide and a comfy open-topped 4WD instead of a converted minibus.

“Focus on obtaining high-quality guiding,” advises Given. “Ultimately, the entire experience depends on the guiding. It is important during planning to ask about guiding, such as if it is possible to receive details on who your guides will be?”

He adds: “We find it interesting that many travellers focus on the decor of the camps or specific locations, but very few know who will guide them, even though that is by far the most critical factor for a wildlife-focused safari.”

Quality guides not only increase your chances of seeing a good range of wildlife, their knowledge enhances your enjoyment of the encounters, providing stimulating insights into species you had previously known little about. A world-class guide is one of the most important investments you will make, and we would suggest you compromise on other aspects of the trip if your budget is restrictive.

### Q WHAT TYPE OF TRAVELLER ARE YOU?

Are you set on bushwalking? Dining on the very best campfire cuisine? Or soaking in a bath with an unforgettable view of the sunset?

We all have a slightly different idea of what makes a place special. To work out what’s right for you, start by consulting guidebooks and websites and talking to safari experts at specialist travel companies.

When we say talk, we mean it. An open conversation can be amazingly productive. As Chris McIntyre of Expert

Africa says: “When someone asks for my advice, I’ll spend a good half-hour chatting about their past holidays and their ideas for this one. It takes a proper conversation to get a feel for what they’re likely to enjoy.”

Whether you’re intending to travel alone, under your own steam (including self-drive), as part of an expert-led small group, with your partner, your children, extended family or friends also has a part to play. Some regions offer great value accommodation for larger groups and families. Others have more romantic options for couples. If you’re travelling with someone who has mobility issues, you’ll need to consider the provision available at the facilities that will host you.

The personalities and fitness levels of your group can also help narrow down certain aspects of your trip. If the thought of sleeping in a tent inside a wildlife reserve would terrify one of you, you may want to opt for lodge accommodation instead. If your stairs at home leave you short of breath, trekking to see gorillas may be out of the question.

Another angle to consider is your preferred type of safari – sitting in a vehicle seeing as many species as you can, taking time to watch a specific animal or herd, or heading out on foot?

Travelling with children doesn’t limit your choice of destination as much as you might believe. Yes, some safari lodges won’t take kids, but there are oodles of others, and national parks, that welcome them with open arms – some even have special children’s programmes. There are some amazing wildlife areas that are malaria-free.

Conservation may also be a consideration. You need to determine “how important your impact on the environment is to you”, says Addison. “We can guide you to eco-friendly camps and lodges, and companies that are ethical and support conservation projects.”

Mitchell adds: “Most, if not all, lodges and wildlife reserves contribute funding towards conservation projects and anti-poaching units. Ultimately, your trip is an investment in the future of the environment, the wildlife and the communities surrounding the area in which you travel.” 

## WHAT ABOUT COVID?

With the restrictions placed on us by Covid-19 remaining fluid, always check the latest regulations governing entry and exit of the destinations you intend to travel to and that of your home country. One way to reduce risk, and logistical complications, is to minimise the number of parks you visit and to remain within one country rather than travelling across borders.

“We have been seeing a trend of staying in fewer places for a longer time,” says Sandy Wood of Pulse Africa. “By doing this, you reduce your risk of transmission because you aren’t moving around as much, but it will also reduce your carbon footprint. Take the opportunity to immerse yourself in the surroundings. You won’t feel guilty for skipping an early morning game drive if you know you’re there for more than a couple of nights.”

*“A safari is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, so don’t skimp. Your tour operator and travel expert are experienced in getting you the very best for your budget. After all, that is why you use them.”*

**BRAD MITCHELL**, RHINO AFRICA

*“Don’t rush! Take your time in your chosen location. It takes the pressure off, increases chance of success and makes for a more immersive and enjoyable experience.”*

**DAN FREE**, WILDLIFE WORLDWIDE

*“Book and travel with a reputable company – one that knows the destination first-hand and employs quality guides.”*

**DEBBIE ADDISON**, WILD FRONTIERS

*“‘Luxury’ or ‘exclusivity’ means different things to different people. Make sure your operator understands you and what you want.”*

**RUTH MAXWELL**, SUBSCRIBER, UK

### Stretch it out:

A Grant’s zebra foal puts its young legs to the test, Kenya









# WHAT ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT?

There's more to be gained than lost, but you should make sensible choices, says **Emma Gregg**

## Going green

Green Safaris use electric safari vehicles (including boats and quad bikes) for their game activities. Increasing numbers of operators across the continent are doing so, as well as running their camps on solar power.

GREEN SAFARIS

There's no escaping it: until the day that transport technology delivers genuinely eco-friendly planes that don't burn fossil fuels and don't pollute, holidays that include long-haul flights will remain an environmentally damaging luxury. But that doesn't mean we should chuck out our safari kit. It simply means it's more important than ever to ask searching questions and pick our destinations, accommodation and activities with care.

In Africa, ecotourism and conservation safaris have the power to deliver benefits that easily outweigh the damage done by flying. The Covid pandemic revealed with

devastating clarity that when tourism grinds to a halt, poaching in impoverished rural areas increases. Well-designed eco-safaris help eliminate this, while empowering rural communities to protect wild habitats from urban expansion, overgrazing and deforestation. Such trips limit the damage done by climate change; in some cases, they even reverse it.

To spend as little time in the air as possible, look for trips that begin with a relatively short, nonstop flight (or a direct route at least), then continue overland, rather than hopping from park to park by light aircraft. And to keep an eye on the big

picture, hunt down companies that offer low-impact camps, lodges and activities and channel a higher-than-average portion of their profits into environmental projects. An increasing number of companies are championing green transport in the bush by offering their guests wildlife-watching trips by electric safari vehicle or electric river boat.

Carbon offsetting can reduce your trip's overall footprint, but it's crucial to choose a reputable scheme, such as the World Land Trust. As a rule of thumb, you should treat the suggested donation as a minimum. 

## COUNTING CARBON

Increasing numbers of tour operators are considering the environmental impact of the holidays they offer. In one of the more committed examples, UK-based Far and Wild has launched a carbon scoring initiative to ensure clients are able to make sustainably-minded choices when planning their travel.

Far and Wild is a founding signatory for the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency – a movement made up of travel industry organisations who have made a commitment to half emissions from travel by 2030.

"This initiative is a world-first for tailor-made travel," says founder Ben Morison. "Jointly with eCollective, we created a survey to measure the carbon footprint that each element of a Far and Wild trip has on the planet."

### *Suggestions for ways that can reduce your overall carbon footprint include:*

- **Get off the tourist trail.** Your trip will have a positive impact on local communities and there will be less risk of overtourism.
- **Use local companies.** This increases the amount of money in the local economy, providing a sustainable revenue for locals.
- **Eat local food.** There is less transport required and you get to try local delicacies
- **Use air conditioning wisely.** Aircon is one of the worst polluters. Opt for evening breeze rather, but if air conditioning keep rooms sealed and turn it off when you're out.
- **Fly thoughtfully.** Fly direct. Spending a bit more to do so to lessen the impact is worth it.
- **Change old habits.** Question the norms, especially at luxury hotels. Think plastic toiletries, fresh towels every day, imported drinks. Be a voice for change and give your feedback.



# Green Safaris



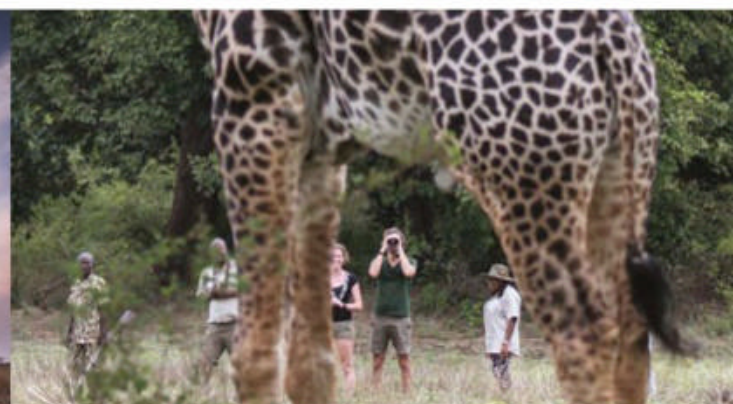
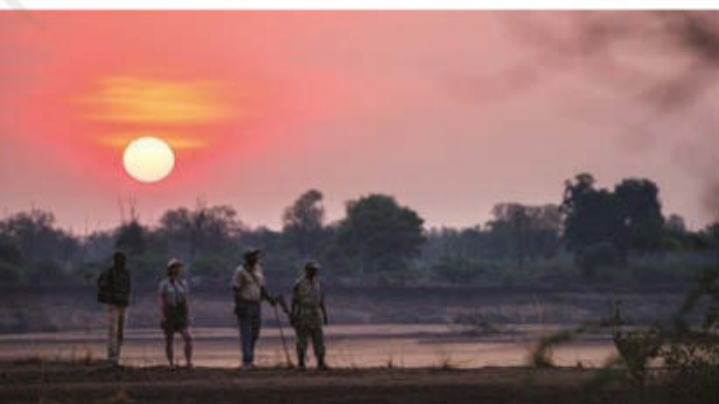
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# HOW **BEST** TO BOOK?

As a prospective safari-goer, how do you decide whether to organise it on your own or book through an operator? Whether you're a first-time Africa traveller or an avowed safari addict, can you arrange a safari as you might a holiday in your home country, or do you need a specialist advisor?

With experience travelling independently and working as a tour operator, **Richard Trillo** weighs up the arguments.



## DIY SAFARI TRIPS

I first visited Kenya in 1981. My girlfriend and I camped wild in a homemade, mosquito-proof tent and only stayed in cheap hotels when there was no option.

Cycling around the country over the course of six months, we glimpsed the occasional zebra or giraffe, a monkey here and a gazelle there. But we didn't experience Africa's wildlife spectacle until a local acquaintance mentioned he was going to the Maasai Mara to see the wildebeest migration and offered us a ride.

Cresting a hill as we approached the Mara River, a vast landscape of wildebeest-covered plains stretched out in front of us. Over the next few days we saw countless animals and witnessed plenty of wildlife drama, from lion cubs learning to hunt to wildebeest river crossings. We were mock-charged by an elephant and we lay awake, wide-eyed in our tent at night, as hyenas whooped in the bush just yards away. We had a magical time and it cost us very little. We were lucky.

Can that approach still work today? The short answer is yes, if you have plenty of time and a flexible schedule. Renting a four-wheel-drive vehicle enables access to many wildlife areas. You can still camp in licensed campsites in some areas, notably in Kenya,

South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia. If you don't want to camp, most countries have basic facilities in key parks, with permanent furnished tents or simple chalets, while in parts of southern Africa you'll find simple lodges, as well as larger establishments catering to the drive-in market.

## DIY SAFARIS: THE PROS

On a DIY safari, you have the joy of taking the wheel, exploring enchanting landscapes, nudging your vehicle into exactly the spot you desire, stopping and slowing down as you choose. Instead of having to share game drives with other guests from camp, you can follow those hyenas or wait for that zebra to give birth for as long as you like.

You can eat the meals you want, when you want. You can stock up on your preferred drinks in the city and enjoy them by a campfire you've built yourself (with wood sold to you by the campsite staff).

If you're staying at drive-in camps or lodges, you can often make a decision at short notice whether to linger longer or move on. Some places allow you to stay on a room-only or bed-and-breakfast basis, allowing you to take as many other meals and drinks as you wish.

## DIY SAFARIS: THE CONS

If you're self-driving, you will have to organise your own park fees, often in advance, and you may well have to pre-book campsites. Admission to some private conservancies is only allowed by air, which means you may not be able to visit some of Africa's best wildlife areas.

If you're behind the wheel, it's difficult to easily photograph or watch animals at the same time. More

**RICHARD TRILLO** IS THE EAST AFRICA MANAGER AT EXPERT AFRICA, AND THE AUTHOR OF *THE ROUGH GUIDE TO KENYA*





ZAMBEZI EXPEDITIONS / AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS

#### Zambezi expeditions:

Mana Pools can easily be enjoyed on a self-drive trip or with an established operator such as African Bush Camps

*Consider self-drive, especially in Namibia where it is easy, cost effective and safe. In Etosha, while you'll spot less than an experienced guide, if you put the hours in, you will see some fantastic sightings with the added satisfaction of having spotted them yourself.*

**SIMON PEARSON,**  
NIGERIA



## CHOOSING A SAFARI COMPANY: QUESTIONS TO ASK

### ARE YOU AN OPERATOR OR AN AGENT?

In many jurisdictions, including the UK, there is a distinction. A booking made with an operator who acts as the legal principal gives you a contract with that company, while bookings made through the many companies who act as agents are sub-contracted to the individual service providers in Africa.

### HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN BUSINESS?

While age isn't always a reliable measure, it's a strong sign that the company has dealt with early wrinkles and is run on a firm footing.

### WHICH COUNTRIES DO YOU SPECIALISE IN?

Safari offerings vary from a single country to trips to almost anywhere in the world. You are likely to receive more detailed advice from a company offering a small range of countries than one that arranges trips to several continents.

### WHAT IS THE BACKGROUND OF THE STAFF?

Look on the website for detailed profiles of the sales consultants and where they have travelled. You wouldn't buy a car from a salesperson who couldn't drive,

so don't hesitate to ask your consultant if they have stayed at the lodge or camp you're interested in.

### DO YOU WORK ON COMMISSION?

Many safari operators pay their staff on results, which can lead to a lack of impartiality.

### HOW SAFE IS MY MONEY?

Check their bonding to ensure your money is safe if the company goes bust. In the UK, which has some of the tightest regulations, money spent on a 'package' (a set of arrangements put together) should be protected: look for an ATOL bond, and memberships of ABTA and (the gold-standard) AITO. As an additional protection, always pay your deposit by credit card: this ensures that your whole holiday cost, up to £30,000, is also protected by the card company.

### WHAT HAPPENS IF THE DOLLAR SPIKES?

Most service providers in Africa charge safari operators in dollars, so a legal guarantee from the company that your trip price is fixed, even if their own costs increase, gives you peace of mind, especially when booking far ahead.

### WHERE CAN I READ YOUR CLIENT REVIEWS?

Good companies are proud of their feedback. Look for verbatim accounts by previous travellers, rather than edited highlights.

### HOW MUCH WILL I LOSE IF I HAVE TO CANCEL?

Check their terms and conditions. Since the pandemic, many safari operators have changed their Ts&Cs to reflect the rapidly changing landscape of Covid-19 rules.

### WHAT BACK-UP DO YOU PROVIDE IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG?

Good operators will be ready to step in to deal with anything from missed connections to mislaid binoculars. You should have phone contacts who can be relied on 24/7 throughout your trip.

### HOW KEEN ARE YOU FOR ME TO BOOK?

Nobody wants the hard sell, but as a potential client, you should expect informed communications with a consultant who knows the countries and safari camps you're interested in. If you want to talk animals, their enthusiasm and knowledge should come across.

critically, you'll have to figure out where to go, with so many routes available in every wildlife area.

Self-catering is somewhat time-consuming and fiddly: you will need some days at the beginning of the trip to organise your logistics and stock up on food and drink.

You'll need to do your own laundry, and find places to keep your phone charged.

Finally, if things do take an unexpected turn – whether it's a problem with the car, a booking or your companion getting unwell – it's your problem. This can be serious, especially if you're travelling solo, so be aware of the risks and try to plan for all possible eventualities.

But perhaps the biggest drawback to organising your own safari is not having easy access to quality guides in the national parks.

Guides are key to a good wildlife experience. You may be lucky to find local guides based where you're staying who know their stuff and can be hired to accompany you. But highly-trained and experienced guides soon find work in the better camps, where the costs are higher.

In the more expensive camps and lodges, game drives are conducted by driver-guides based permanently on site. They know their areas in great detail and usually have intimate knowledge of the local wildlife – ➔





*It's better to choose three nights each at two lodges than two nights each at three. When an agent says you'll be on, say, a three-day safari, this will likely only include four game drives, not six, since you won't be doing one on the morning you arrive or the afternoon you leave.*

**RON VAN DER A,**  
THE NETHERLANDS

where to find wild dogs denning, a female leopard with cubs, or the fortunes of a trio of lion brothers battling to take over a pride.

### BOOKING A PRIVATE SAFARI YOURSELF

Assuming you know what you like and what you want, what is to stop you organising your own safari, travelling by scheduled light aircraft between camps and enjoying top quality guiding?

In principle, nothing – so long as you're prepared to put in time on your computer and send a good number of emails.

In practice, it can be hard to know where to start. Not every combination of camps or regions is logistically straightforward. If you plan to include more than one country, what are the considerations in terms of regional flights, visas and Covid-19 protocols? How do you know which camp has the best reputation for sightings of a particular species? For guided bush walks? For multi-generational families? For honeymoon couples? And

then, should you stay three or four nights or is two enough? Can you get from Camp A to Camp B in a day? Does the nightly cost include park fees or conservation charges?

Moreover, while most camps or lodges will be happy to take your booking (not all accept direct reservations), they may not want to hold space for you without immediate payment. If you're setting up a number of places to stay, at what point do you press the button and commit to each of them?

### USING A SPECIALIST TRAVEL COMPANY

There are two main ways a safari can be organised through a company: either as a private itinerary, dictated by you but working with an agent, or by booking a seat on a group safari with a fixed departure date. If you're not sure if safaris are for you, then trying a less expensive group safari tour might be the best plan.

### HOW DO THE COSTS COMPARE?

Surely booking direct is cheaper, so the research and decision-making process will be worthwhile? And by booking direct, your money is going straight into the local community – isn't it?

Most camps that take direct bookings will give you the same rates they give their safari operator partners. These

## Why use a specialist operator?

### The most important

reason to use a specialist operator is the expert advice that is freely available from them. This takes two parts.

First, practical advice and specialist knowledge on where to go and what to do, usually with a level of insight well beyond what you might get online. Whether it is knowing what the local game-viewing is like, what the camp layout and atmosphere is like or how meals are prepared, an experienced operator should be able to give you detailed information because he or she will have visited the camps you

are considering. Over the course of a career, some specialists will have stayed at most camps multiple times, and at different times of year.

Second, general guidance regarding travel to Africa and specifically, life on safari. This is more complicated than travel elsewhere, and a specialist operator will think of the details that make a trip seamless: what to pack, what the luggage limits are, visa requirements, what cash you will need, what the weather will be like, advice on malaria... the list goes on.

We have many clients who have been on numerous safaris. Rather than being so

familiar with safari travel that they no longer need advice, the reality is that they rely on us even more now because they are acutely aware of what they really appreciate on safari, and of what they wish to avoid.

A specialist operator provides important logistical support, both in terms of travel arrangements and emergency back up. If something goes wrong, you have an experienced hand to guide you through. And of course you get financial protection by booking with a fully bonded operator. The last two years has shown the benefit of this, both in terms of



operational support and financial protection.

### Here are a few common things that people booking their own safaris get wrong:

- "We arrived by road. It took us six hours, it was hot and bumpy and we got bitten by tsetse flies. No-one told us we could fly it in 30 minutes for almost the same price."
- "We are here for two nights. Does that mean we will miss out on half the activities available?"

- "We wanted to see wild dogs. We read they could be seen here, but our guide says they haven't been seen for the last two seasons."
- "We came here because we wanted to do some walking safaris, but apparently you have to pre-book as there isn't a walking guide permanently available. We didn't know that."

**ROB SLATER** IS THE  
MANAGING DIRECTOR OF  
SAFARI CONSULTANTS



operators get a discount on those rates, usually related to the volume of their bookings, and they make their money by charging clients the same – and sometimes less.

Safari operators transfer their payments to Africa in bulk, but as a traveller booking direct and paying by credit card, you will make a number of separate payments, usually with card surcharges ranging from 3–6 per cent.

So why would a camp owner be happy to pay a slice of their income to a safari operator? Why not wait for clients to book direct and keep 100 per cent of their payment?

First, dealing with trusted partners overseas is much easier than working direct with the public, especially if they have camps and lodges to run. And second, good camp owners know how to run camps and deliver a rewarding experience, while good safari operators know how to help clients choose the right itinerary and the right camps.

So for owners, guests coming through an operator have already been through a gentle pre-selection process that means they've made qualified decisions about choosing this camp. Confident, decisive clients mean better safaris, better feedback and better word-of-mouth recommendations.

### USING ONLINE TRAVEL PLATFORMS

Be careful of booking safari camps and lodges using the big-name, volume-driven online travel agents (OTAs). Many small and specialist safari camps won't be available to book on OTAs because the risk of customer dissatisfaction is too high. OTAs are fine for city and resort hotels, but they don't cater well for the complex travel logistics of a safari. Does the price include park fees or games drives? What kind of drinks are included, if any? How would you book the balloon flight? Or the overnight fly-camp? Which airstrip do you fly to, and will the camp know where and when to meet you?

### WHERE DOES YOUR MONEY GO?

Whether you book all the elements direct or have a safari operator organise the itinerary for you, the money paid for your safari feeds into the local community in the same way. The most important element is salaries: each member of staff at a camp or lodge is likely to be supporting an extended family network that may amount to dozens of people. For many staff, especially driver-guides, another important element of their income is the tips left by safari-goers. Some camps make suggestions for how much to give, though this suggests a formality to tipping which erodes the responsibility of the owner to pay decent salaries.

A vital second tier of funds comes from park and conservancy fees. While national park and reserve fees usually go straight to central or local government coffers, the daily fees at community-owned wildlife conservancies support local people and conservation, paying the salaries of rangers and maintaining clinics, schools and veterinary services. Whether you book direct or use a safari operator, the same money is distributed in the same way. 

## TIME FOR **STABILITY**

Building confidence will help travel, says **Kate Kenward**

**Change, pivoting, re-engineering, transforming.** These and other words have been repeated constantly over the past 20 months as our industry has tried to quickly adapt to the daily episodes of this pandemic.

As a membership association representing the buyers and suppliers of African tourism, we too have addressed these ever-changing challenges, by restructuring to create a sustainable organisation for the benefit of our members and the industry.

The travel industry is good at meeting and dealing with calamities – they occur on a regular basis in one form or another, but not for this length of time or on this scale. Many companies have faced the last 20 months without any income, all the while servicing their loyal customers in their quest to travel.

The instability created by the hastily re-introduced and briefly imposed travel restrictions on southern Africa in December did not help, undermining the growing confidence that we were entering the phase of learning to live with the presence of the virus.

Travellers are certainly becoming increasingly aware that by booking with an ATTA travel organiser



that fully protects holiday funds, they can travel with the certainty that they will be supported if things do go awry. Our members have also applied flexible booking conditions to meet the ever-changing demands of this pandemic.

Africa is ready and willing to receive travellers from around the world. Our members take protocols very seriously and the safety and wellbeing of all customers is our prime consideration.

May 2022 bring the stability we all crave and that is so desperately needed to sustain conservation, communities and travel companies who have been so resilient over the last two years.

**KATE KENWARD** IS THE MANAGING DIRECTOR OF ATTA. ATTA.TRAVEL





ANNE AND IAN WILKINSON

#### Self-supporting.

Ian Wilkinson preparing the *braai* after a day's rain in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park; self-drive chalet at Mopani Rest Camp, Kruger National Park; Anne improvising, making toast without a toaster.

## GOING SOLO

Some people opt to organise a safari themselves. How might this work for you and what are the challenges? *Travel Africa* reader **Anne Wilkinson** shares her experience.

We soon realised the traditional safari format – early morning game drive, rest in camp, late afternoon game drive – was not for us. We craved going where we wanted, when we wanted, literally spending all day in the bush, and all within our (limited) budget. Since 1983, we've done nothing but self-drive in Africa.

With roots in Zimbabwe, our first trips were to Hwange National Park. Arranging these was relatively easy – we already knew the place like the back of our hands and we still had friends there who could help with national park reservations. All we had to do was book a flight and arrange car hire.

Going further afield brought with it much more legwork, but we've always been happy to do that – and each trip is now planned with something akin

to military precision. We research flight options, vehicle availability, accommodation, distances from airport to our destination, road conditions, availability of food, security issues and much more. This is certainly more time-consuming than booking an 'off-the-peg' holiday through an operator; on the other hand, we both find planning part of the fun.

Have there been downsides to this? Yes, a few. The principal one is that you have no tour operator to fall back on if things go wrong. Self-drive means you're on your own and you should plan for all eventualities. Once there, you'll have to sort out any problems yourself.

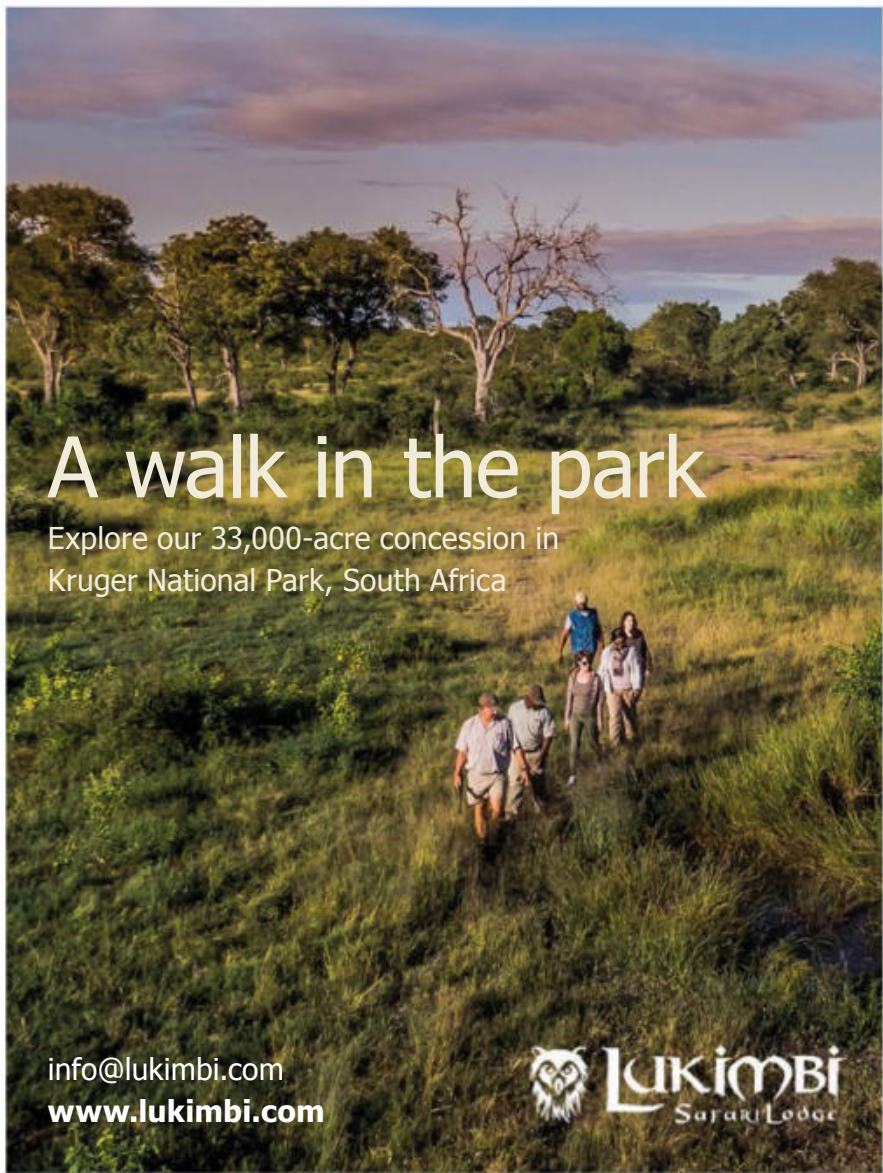
Good planning helps, but it can't negate every problem – and we've certainly had our fair share. Witness the time we booked our flights from Heathrow to Namibia well in advance

and turned up at the airport to discover that Air Namibia hadn't flown from London for the past six months. That took a bit of sorting out, but we managed. These things are all part and parcel of doing it yourself and can be what makes a trip memorable.

Don't expect your government-run rondavel to have a kettle or even a cup, so you will need to take those with you, or improvise, to make a cuppa. Consider also that it's up to you to cope with road conditions, vehicle breakdowns and also to find and identify what wildlife you see. But there's nothing better than sitting with a glass of wine at the end of a long day watching wildlife and listening to the night sounds of Africa. Especially when you've got there under your own steam.

If you want to do it on your own, I can sum up my advice in three words: research, plan and check! 🍷





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# WHEN IS THE BEST TIME FOR GAME VIEWING?

Does it really matter which season you travel in? How do the seasons influence your wildlife watching experience?

BY MORGAN TRIMBLE

**T**he seasons dictate wildlife distribution and behaviour and set the scene for game viewing and ambience on safari. So when is the best time to visit? It depends. Seasonality differs regionally and certain locales feature specific annual wildlife events to consider. If you're revisiting a spot, a different season offers nuance – miombo trees flushing with colour, mass termite emergences with the first rains, courtship displays, rutting and more.

While bad weather and poor access close some locations for months, the 'off season' isn't always off limits. When the roads flood, some creative lodges offer fresh perspectives on boating safaris. Provided the lodges in a destination are open, there's no bad time to visit. The timing of high season rates gives a sense of the most popular season. But for the individual, what's popular isn't always right.

## SOUTHERN AFRICA

Here, the question is dry versus wet. The dry season stretches from May to October with little to no precipitation. It is 'high season', particularly in the latter months, when the struggle for survival reaches a crescendo. As ephemeral pools wither and disappear, herbivores converge on rivers and permanent waterholes. Dwindling vegetation reveals bare earth and ochre tones dominate. Buffalo and elephant herds assemble in staggering numbers. Predators enjoy easy pickings and, with landscapes bare, they're easier to spot. The dry season coincides with Austral winter. Temperatures are mild, but the heat builds in October and November, before the storms break.

Rain falls from November to April. Spring rains spur explosive growth that swells to cacophonous greens through summer. Bucketing afternoon thunderstorms are common, but there's plenty of sunshine. Animals are fat, new-born life offers extra excitement, migrant birds boost species lists, and colourful butterflies abound. For photographers,





**Secret season:** A leopard in Zambia's South Luangwa National Park during the rains, when vegetation is lush, photographed on safari with Time+Tide Africa, which operates five camps and mobile walking safaris in the park

the air is clear, and verdant vegetation and dramatic skies make appealing backdrops.

While there's more to see in the green season; the trick is getting a clear line of sight amid dense bush. With abundant water, animals disperse, and mud and flooding render fewer roads drivable. Exploring river loops or parking at water holes isn't a sure bet for sightings. On the other hand, predators often travel along roads in the mornings, avoiding tangled, wet vegetation.

#### **EAST AFRICA**

Closer to the equator, tropical temperatures are warm year-round. Dual rainy and dry seasons complicate the wet-dry dichotomy. Landscapes don't reach the seasonal extremes of the south.

The dry seasons from January to March and June to October offer peak game viewing for similar reasons – open vegetation and animals congregating near water. The long rains from April to May, involve frequent, heavy afternoon downpours. Many lodges close, and road access is tricky.

Short rains in November and December are meeker, and some travellers prefer this season for good rates and fewer tourists.

East Africa's Great Migration is the epitome of a seasonal event. The migration continues year-round as masses of wildebeest and zebra loop through Kenya and Tanzania, following seasonal grazing. Planning and luck help travellers connect with the great herds and catch annual highlights like dramatic Mara River crossings around July and calving in the Serengeti from February to March.

#### **WHAT ABOUT THE WEST?**

Like in the East, tropical West African temperatures are relatively constant. The rains are less seasonal, but peak from April to September with less rain and more seasonality at higher latitudes. With few paved roads, wet season travel is difficult. October to March is usually the driest and recommended for wildlife viewing, but Harmattan season brings hot, dusty winds off the Sahara starting around December. →





# AMBOSELI THROUGH THE SEASONS

Amboseli National Park in Kenya experiences the striking seasonal variations you'll encounter in many of Africa's parks and reserves. How does it influence your wildlife watching?

**D**uring the dry season Amboseli turns arid and dusty, with wildlife thickly concentrated around available water sources. In the rains, however, the park is transformed into a verdant expanse of fertile grassland, with wildlife more dispersed and difficult to spot.

There are two wet seasons here: the 'long rains' during April and May, and a shorter rainy season in November–December (except during occasional, unpredictable years of drought). The dry seasons run from June to September and January to March, when wildlife watching is at its best and visitor numbers peak.

## THE DRY

As the rains recede, the landscape becomes increasingly arid, living up to the park's name, derived from the Maasai *Empusel*, meaning "salty dust". Vegetation dies back and the shallow waters of the seasonal Lake Amboseli evaporate, leaving a fine layer of crystallized salt, creating strange mirages in

the heat of the day. Visitor numbers are also at their peak.

This is the best time to spot Amboseli's celebrated elephants, marching sedately across the dry bed of Lake Amboseli and congregating in the park's papyrus swamplands, fed year-round by underground springs from Kilimanjaro. December to March are also the best months to see elephant calves (although they are born throughout the year).

Other wildlife also returns to the park as water and grazing become increasingly scarce elsewhere. It congregates around the park's swamplands, with abundant herds of wildebeest, gazelle, zebra and giraffe, along with hippos and the occasional lion lurking in the reeds.

A rich array of birdlife is also very much in evidence, with over 400 species ranging from colourful barbets and

### Scene and herd:

Amboseli's famous tuskers photographed in dry and wet seasons. See more at [williamfortescue.com](http://williamfortescue.com)







BOTH PICTURES BY WILLIAM FORTESCUE

starlings through to Marabou stork and the huge kori bustard.

#### THE WET

The rains turn Amboseli a verdant green, covering the plains with lush grass and (given sufficient rainfall) filling Lake Amboseli with a shallow layer of water. The clearer air also makes this the best time for views of Kilimanjaro, particularly early in the morning and late afternoon. Visitor numbers drop significantly which, combined with the natural beauty of

the park during the wet, makes this an enjoyable alternative to visiting in the dry – although wildlife is harder to spot.

Elephants begin to disperse across the park and beyond. Some, led by matriarchs, follow migratory corridors stretching all the way into neighbouring Tanzania, although others stay close to the park.

Ample water and grazing means that other wildlife also scatters across the park and into surrounding conservancies and community land, where it mingles with the local Maasai

and their livestock, although a year-round population of hippos, warthogs and impalas can be seen in the park's swamps, along with vervet monkeys.

This is the best time for birdwatching, as northern migrants such as the lesser kestrel and white stork arrive to mingle with Amboseli's myriad resident species. Colourful aquatic birds such as the black-headed heron and grey-crowned crane can be seen foraging amidst the waters, along with huge flocks of vivid-pink flamingoes – one of the park's most iconic sights. 

CHECK OUT THE WORK OF **AMBOSELI TRUST FOR ELEPHANTS**, WHICH HAS BEEN STUDYING ELEPHANT BEHAVIOUR IN THE AMBOSELI ECOSYSTEM FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS. ALSO GET YOUR HANDS ON THE BOOK *IMPRESSIONS OF AMBOSELI*, BY CYNTHIA MOSS AND SOPHIE WALBEOFFE (AVAILABLE DIGITALLY AT [BIT.LY/TA-AMBOSELI](https://bit.ly/ta-amboseli))







# SAFARIS FOR ALL

There's no reason why you shouldn't feel you can't enjoy a wildlife-watching holiday in Africa – no matter your circumstance. Companies are increasingly geared up to cater for all niche requirements

STEVIE MANN / CORAL TREE FAMILY SAFARIS



CATH ADVENTURE



WILL WHITFORD



DESERT AND DELTA SAFARIS, BOTSWANA

ENDEAVOUR SAFARIS, BOTSWANA



## NEVER TOO OLD

In the walnut tree outside my window is a life-size leopard, fashioned out of chicken wire and an old shower curtain. There it lies, all four legs and tail dangling, to remind me of the big cat country I am missing so desperately. Having spent the 86th year of my life in lockdown, I can't wait to go back. But my age begs the question: am I getting too old for Africa? For sure, my bush-bashing days are over. No more walking safaris in the Luangwa; not with my creaking joints. But if you are faced with the same concerns, provided you are still fit enough to climb into a Land-Cruiser there is no reason why you can't still enjoy a safari with a little careful planning. My advice would be to keep long-haul travel to a minimum. Kenya is only eight hours away, meaning that you can land in Nairobi at first light, board a light aircraft at Wilson Airport and be in the Mara in time for breakfast. Once you are in the bush there is nowhere healthier, and nothing more arduous than a morning game drive – followed by lunch and a long siesta!

**BRIAN JACKMAN**

My mum Jean and I had a truly special time when I took her to South Luangwa. Aged 75, she'd never been to Africa before, although she always loved wildlife stories and documentaries, and I wanted her to see the natural world I loved. Everything was new and wondrous to her, and that rubbed off on me too, seeing the wildlife afresh through her eyes. The bond from that trip is still strong, as are the memories, from her tears on seeing her first elephant, sundowner G&Ts, and tracking leopard on foot to flying in a microlight over the Luangwa Valley and taking a helicopter over Victoria Falls. People we met said they wished they'd taken their parents on safari and we chatted to a (grown-up) father and son who were also loving their time together. It felt as if the four of us were members of a secret club, where you'll only know how special it is once you're there. **SUE WATT**





## YOUNG EXPLORERS

Taking your children on safari is educational. Not all classrooms have walls, and they are likely to come home with newfound interests, not to mention memories for life. To ensure your children will remember the experience, age five and above is ideal. However, there are factors to consider to ensure the trip is fun and enriching for the whole family.

**Where to go?** For children under 10, we recommend Kenya or South Africa, as the wilderness areas are most accessible and there are direct flights from UK. Once children enter their teens, the continent is your oyster. Most safaris are accessible for over 12s, except for some specialist activities such as gorilla trekking (15+).

**Besides your destination, what else should you bear in mind?** The number of locations and travel times is something to consider. Long days on safari can be tiring; it's better to get to know one or two places and travel slowly. Anti-malarial medication is advised in many regions and easy for young children to take – don't let this put you off.

**Adding beach time?** Choose a destination that combines well with Indian Ocean islands, such as Tanzania.

**Where to stay?** Most camps and lodges have at least one family unit. Book a private vehicle for ultimate flexibility without disturbing others. Your kids will thank you for choosing somewhere with a swimming pool.

**TESS AND MIKE KELLY**  
CORAL TREE, UNIQUE FAMILY SAFARIS



## DISABILITY SAFARIS

Over the last 20 years, we have taken hundreds of people with disabilities on safari. This includes safarigoers with mobility issues, hearing and visual impairments, invisible disabilities, oxygen users and even those requiring dialysis.

While parks and camps in East and southern Africa are generally more accessible for people with disabilities, nowhere should be off limits. Indeed, later this year, we are running a canoeing safari in the Okavango for travellers with paraplegia.

The key, as always, is in the planning. Having chosen where you want to go, and what you want to see, talk to your safari provider about who can best cater for your requirements once there.

For example, you may need to consider whether there are wheelchair ramps at the lodges or specially designed game-viewing vehicles? But even if there isn't, there will always be friendly staff on hand to lift you into the vehicle or up to your room. Specialist tour operators and disability-friendly facilities are available in more places than you might think – and this is improving all the time. But even if such offerings are inaccessible in your desired destination, there is, more often than not, a solution.

Just ask!

**MIKE HILL**  
ENDEAVOUR SAFARIS



## CALLING ALL WOMEN

"10 days, 10 women, in the Namibian wilderness, tracking desert elephants, having an adventure, dawn yoga, inspiration and singing round a campfire, sleeping out under the stars, meeting Namibian women and hearing their story..."

This is the inspiration behind The Matriarch Adventure, a safari that seeks to connect women with nature, each other and themselves.

I realised that there are times when either too many demands or a crisis in confidence means that women rarely give themselves permission to take time out to enjoy the world, so decided that there was no better way to do this than to immerse oneself in the African bush.

All-female group safaris are becoming increasingly popular, and it's a great thing. Going on safari is often seen as 'something you do on your honeymoon' or with your partner, but how liberating to feel that you – as a single mother of three, or a strung out businesswoman, or a woman whose children have flown the nest – can jump into a 4x4 and go and track elephants with like-minded women. This kind of experience is life changing – realising that you can move out of your comfort zone whilst being cared for by a team of trackers and expedition leaders, and certainly gives confidence and a new zest for life. The memories of a safari where you laugh with newfound 'sisters' under a full African moon are priceless.

**CATHERINE EDELL**  
CATHADVENTURE



## SOLO TRAVELLERS

A safari is a wonderfully rewarding holiday for anyone travelling alone – engaging and entertaining with endless opportunities to enjoy new experiences and meet new people. Whether you want to join a small group of like-minded travellers or have a tailor-made safari planned just for you, there are numerous possibilities.

If you are looking for company, then one of the best things to consider is to join a small group, of typically no more than eight people, on a set departure itinerary.

These safaris operate on frequent departure dates throughout the year and vary in length and style. There are some particularly good ones in Namibia and Botswana.

Other group trips focus on a particular activity – riding, canoeing or walking, for example – and are excellent options for solo travellers.

If group travel doesn't appeal and you'd prefer a tailor-made safari, you can still expect to enjoy lively company on safari. Game drives or bush walks with other guests are fun, and sundowner drinks around the fire are a good place to chat about the wildlife sightings during the day. Meals are taken with other guests and the atmosphere is similar to that of an informal dinner party. Managers, guides and camp hosts are a hospitable bunch and are experts when it comes to making sure no one feels left out.

**ALICE GULLY**  
AARDVARK SAFARIS







# MIX IT UP!

Most safaris are vehicle-based, traditionally with two game drives per day. But there are a host of other ways to experience wildlife, and combining several of these activities will give you a broader perspective and appreciation for the wilderness

BY **SHARON GILBERT-RIVETT**

It is exhilarating getting up just before dawn, grabbing a quick coffee and maybe a rusk or two before climbing onto an open safari vehicle and heading out into the wilds of Africa to see what wildlife you can find.

Game drives are at the core of the safari experience and for good reason – they offer you a convenient and highly mobile platform from which to view animals, and are suitable for all ages. But to get a wider appreciation of wildlife and its habitat, it's a good idea to vary the way you engage with it by looking at other activities that offer a different point of view. Here are some suggestions for your next trip.

GREAT PLAINS CONSERVATION



**Pacing yourself:**  
Riding with giraffes at ol Donyo Lodge, Chyulu Hills, Kenya.

## SADDLE-UP

Riding in the wilderness is a wonderful way to get close to wildlife. You've got two choices here: horseback or mountain bike. Both offer the opportunity to view game at close quarters and traverse the bush in a unique way. When you're on the back of a horse, you are viewed by other animals as part of it and just another creature. This makes for superlative game viewing experiences. Like horse-riding, cycling through wild Africa also requires a level of fitness and skill but the rewards are outstanding.

**Top tip: Tell your operator in advance your level of experience so they can best accommodate you: most will cater for inexperienced riders as well as experts.**

**Lion up:** Encountering big cats on foot at Chiawa Camp, Lower Zambezi National Park, Zambia



CHIWA SAFARIS

## ON TWO FEET

Walking in the wilderness encapsulates the spirit of Africa more than any other game viewing activity. It doesn't matter whether it's a two-hour bush walk or a multi-day trail, there's no better way to connect with Mother Africa. When you're walking you are part of the environment, not removed from it. Animals view you differently and as a result you see them in a new light – especially when it comes to iconic mega fauna and predators! The thrill of walking is addictive, and you don't have to be super-fit to enjoy it.

**Top tip: Take a pair of comfortable, closed walking shoes with a decent sole to protect your feet from thorns. Never walk in new shoes.**



## TAKE TO THE SKIES

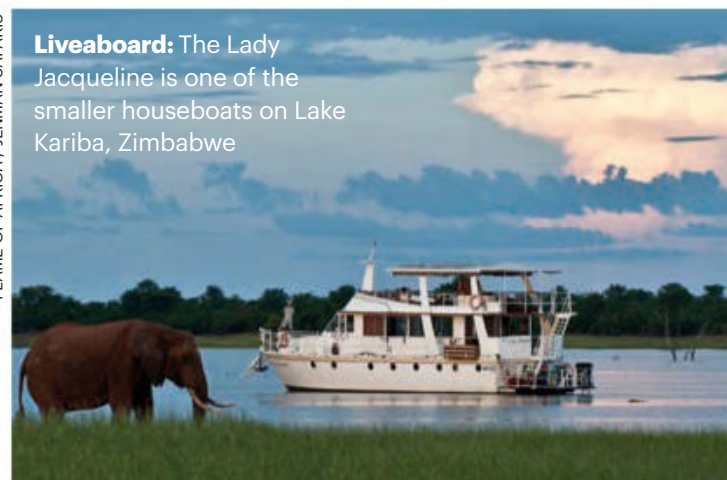
You'll never see Africa the same way again once you view it from the air. Flying immediately gives context to the wilderness and enables you to see the lay of the land and how animals move through it, with game paths and routes to waterholes clearly visible. Whether it's in a helicopter, small aircraft, microlight or hot air balloon, soaring over the vastness of this incredible continent can be a humbling and unforgettable experience. **Top tip: If you have the chance to take a plane or helicopter between camps instead of a road transfer, grab it!**



**View to a thrill:** Most lodge operators offer air transfers to their remote camps. It's a great way to survey the landscape from above. Here, Safari Air flies over the Okavango for Desert and Delta Safaris

SAFARI AIR / DESERT AND DELTA SAFARIS

FLAME OF AFRICA / JENMAN SAFARIS



**Liveaboard:** The Lady Jacqueline is one of the smaller houseboats on Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe

## WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE

If you're heading anywhere near a river or lake, be sure to organise time in a boat, canoe or mokoro. Being on the water will allow you to get close to wildlife in an unobtrusive way and help you spot animals you mightn't otherwise see. In some places you can actually stay on the water in houseboats, venturing out each day in smaller tender boats to explore the waterways and channels of some of Africa's greatest river systems, lakes and dams – Lake Kariba or the Chobe and Okavango Panhandle in particular come to mind. **Top tip: Don't forget your camera. Photographing from the water gives you a unique point of view.**

**Moving experience:** Guests at Marataba Camps in South Africa help with rhino conservation exercises



MARATABA CONSERVATION CAMPS

## HANDS ON

You won't get closer to African wildlife than helping with a relocation, collaring or monitoring/tracking exercise. Getting involved in conservation programmes and participating in the process of protecting endangered species is exceptionally rewarding and takes the game-viewing experience to the next level. Likewise, indulging in a learning experience while on safari can add to the wildlife-watching experience, irrespective of whether it's studying photographic techniques or art lessons!

**Top tip: Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone and get your hands dirty to learn new things – doing so will give you some of the most rewarding wildlife experiences there are.**



# I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW...

Don't get caught out peering quizzically into the trees when others are admiring a lounging leopard

BY **MIKE UNWIN**

**M**y top safari tip in two words? Easy. *Take binoculars.* I've been using my extra eyes for so long that I consider them a part of my anatomy (and, frankly, more valuable than many other parts), so I'm amazed

when they don't make someone's packing list, despite the fortune spent on cameras. Do they realise what they're missing?

First up, 'bins' are not only for bird nerds. They will improve – nay, transform – your view of anything they alight on, from elephant to elephant shrew. Sightings

on safari are often more distant than TV might suggest. Binoculars will turn a distant rustle in the long grass into a large spotted cat with a tattered left ear, or a lump in a tree into an indignant owl with surprisingly pink eyelids.

What's more, bins are not just for

## ***Eyepieces***

Always look through both together. Binoculars are hinged in the centre, so adjust the eyepieces to the right width for your own eyes.

## ***Focusing ring***

Turn it to make the image sharp. Keep one finger resting on this while using your binoculars, so you can quickly adjust focal length as your subject moves closer or further away.

## ***Objective lens***

Where the light enters. The wider it is, the greater the light-gathering capacity. The width (in mm) is the larger of the two numbers in the spec: eg 10 x 42.

## ***Strap***

Adjust to a length that suits you. The binoculars should sit comfortably around your neck, without bouncing as you walk.

## ***Rainguard***

Helps to protect eyepieces against dust, as well as rain. A handy hint: fix the strap through one side only, so you can slip the rainguard sideways off the eyepieces and quickly out of the way.

**Top tip:** don't look down at your binoculars when trying to find something through them; instead, keep your eyes on the target and raise your binoculars to them.



SWAROVSKI EL42, ©SWAROVSKI OPTIK



ogling what your guide has shown you. They allow you to be proactive and spot your own wildlife. You have an optical superpower, so use it: sweep the skyline, comb the canopy, scan, scan and scan again. You'll be amazed by what you find.

So, the arguments against:

**Expensive?** Not necessarily. You can buy a serviceable pair for the price of decent walking boots. Remember, you'll also use them when you get back home.

**A hassle?** Not really: a mid-range pair fits easily around your neck or slips into a daypack. You'll soon get used to wearing them; just adjust the strap for comfort.

**Tricky to use?** Not for long. Practice by switching between distances, from the far horizon to the nearest bush, and adjusting the focus as quickly as you can. Train them on birds during downtime. It'll soon come naturally.

In summary, there are NO arguments against. You can even use binoculars at night. In fact, never leave them behind on a night drive. Simply look down the spotlight beam and hey presto, those two pinpricks of eye-shine – all that is visible to your binocular-less companions – resolve magically into the whiskered face of a genet.

### Which pair?

Brand-wise, you get what you pay for. Top-of-the-range bins have super-clear optics and greater durability but will, of course, set you back. Budget aside, consider what spec suits your needs.

Every pair comes with twin numbers (eg: 10x50). The lower number indicates magnification: '10' means ten times bigger than seen with the naked eye. The higher number is the width of the objective lens (the opposite end from the eye pieces): the wider this is, the more light gets in.

A high-spec pair (say 10x50) is optically powerful but may feel heavy for some. A low-spec 'compact' pair (say 8x21) is conveniently lightweight but not great for scanning wide views or in poor light. Many find a mid-range pair (eg: 8x42) a good compromise.

Get advice, try them out and all will become clear. And if it doesn't, try taking off the lens caps.

## CHOOSING A **FIELD GUIDE**

Looking for reference material to help you identify and learn more about the animals you spot? We sought the advice of **Martin Mbewe Sekelani**, senior guide and safari manager at Kafunta Safaris in Zambia

**I have been guiding** for over 25 years and I've used many different field guides in my career. For us safari guides, these are as important as a good pair of binoculars, particularly for birding as it helps to discuss the differences between species, especially when you have keen birders as guests. I'm also very interested in butterflies, although they may not be as exciting to most people.

My favourite is *The Wildlife of Southern Africa: A field guide to the animals and plants of the region*, by Vincent Carruthers, because it is light to carry, even on walks. It covers a wide range of species for quick referencing and it's always possible back in camp to gather more information and cross-check facts with other books like the Roberts, Estes and Palgrave.

Carruthers' book describes over 2000 plants and animals, and has a lot of illustrations. Although I usually prefer photographs (because the colors are more real), it is good to work with drawings when they show the clear variations in species and ages and sexes.

If I was to recommend some guides for travellers to southern Africa, I would include:

- **The Wildlife of Southern Africa: A field guide to the animals and plants of the region**, by Vincent Carruthers

- **Pathfinder: Illustrated for Nature Enthusiasts**, by Janesta Pulella

- **The Behavior Guide to African Mammals**, by Richard Despard Estes

- **Trees of Southern Africa**, by Keith Coates Palgrave

**And for birding:**

- **Sasol Birds of Southern Africa** by Ian Sinclair and Phil Hockey

- **Roberts Bird Guide**  
● **Beat about the bush: birds**, by Trevor Carnaby

If size and weight are not a concern – maybe kept for reference at home – there is also **Birds of Africa, South of the Sahara**, by Ian Sinclair and Peter Ryan. When it comes to geographic coverage, this is extremely complete.

Nowadays there are also some good smartphone applications, which are very useful (Sasol and Roberts are both available as apps, and work offline).



KAFUNTA SAFARIS





## PLANNING PREPARATION

# PACK LIKE A PRO

## THE EXPERT'S GUIDE TO WHAT TO TAKE ON SAFARI



*Don't worry about buying special 'safari clothes' – just bring comfortable clothing you already have, in muted colours. Be sure to check what the weather will be like.*

**AVARY DOUBLEDAY, USA**

*Consider taking one or two camera traps. These affordable pieces of kit are easy to set up by strapping to a tree each evening and the next morning you can see what wandered through camp overnight. You'll be pleasantly surprised, and it's amazing to realise just how close these animals were.*

**JULIE OSBORNE-TAME, UK**

Packing for a safari is a bit of an art form. On long game drives or walks you'll want to stay comfortable and protect yourself from the sun, insects and other hazards, while you'll also need to think about more personal needs. Here's some suggestions to get you started.

### CLOTHING

Light, breathable, quick-drying fabrics which wick moisture away from the skin make a huge difference, and neutral earth colours (khaki, green, brown) will help you blend into the bush. And be sure not to take anything that rustles.

Cotton is a traditional favourite, although modern synthetic fabrics such as BUGTech and Rufiji feature insect-resistant weaves and treatments, plus built-in sun protection, while anti-microbial or anti-bacterial fabrics also mean your clothes stay fresh for longer. And remember, you can never have too many pockets.

Layering is the best way of dealing with the fluctuating temperatures experienced during, say, early-morning game drives, which start cold and end hot. Take a fleece for colder times of the day and night. A good brimmed hat will also protect your neck, unlike a cap. You'll need sturdy footwear and comfy, well-fitting socks, while

safari gaiters offer added protection against thorns. If travelling in the rainy season, a plastic poncho offers shelter from the wet and packs down to virtually nothing.

A bandana or cotton scarf is a really versatile piece of kit – you can wear it over the mouth and nose to protect against dust when driving, or dip in water and put around your neck for a quick cool-off. A buff wrap is another good way to keep your hair out of eyes.

Decent sunglasses are worth their weight in gold – make sure you pack a pair with strong UV protection, while quality polarized lenses help reduce glare. And keep them in a hard case when not in use.

### MEDS, TOILETRIES AND WATER

Most lodges provide insect repellent but pack plenty if travelling independently or for peace of mind – and balm for when you do get bitten. High-factor sunblock is another must, even on overcast days. You might also want to pack lip balm or sunscreen, while wet wipes will be invaluable to stay (relatively) clean and fresh during drives.

Most camps now provide water refill stations and single-use bottles for guests, although you might want to take your own, perhaps with a built-in filter (such as those

offered by Water-to-Go) if you have any concerns about water safety.

### OTHER KIT

A small daypack is the easiest way to keep your stuff together when out on safari – collapsible packs such as the Forclaz Foldable are great space savers. A journal, notebook or sketchbook are all good for recording your sightings and impressions, while some travellers also carry a field guide for reference on the go. A compact torch could be useful – a wind-up version saves the need to carry spare batteries.

### WOMEN'S ESSENTIALS

Sun, sweat, dust and sunscreen can play havoc with your skin. A lot of make-up simply melts so most go bare-faced, although a simplified make-up bag with the basics will serve you well for evenings. Moisturiser, face scrub or face masks help revive the skin, while leave-in conditioner also protects longer locks from daytime damage – and bring plenty of hair bands.

Sport bras can be more comfortable on bumpy tracks, while a sarong can function as a skirt, wrap, headscarf or even towel. And be sure to bring plenty of sanitary supplies, as required, sealed in a waterproof storage bag.





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African Raptors - a fieldguide by Clark and Davies (Bloomsbury) is the first of the Croom Helm Ornithology Series to focus on the continent of Africa and the 106 species of birds of prey that grace the skies on any safari. Be transported by the artworks

to many of the most beautiful places in Africa - giclee prints of all 53 colour plates and 20 of the originals, including the cover, may be purchased from Rookwood Studios. Have a browse maybe you will find your favourite place in Africa to keep on your wall somewhere.

**PATRICK MAVROS**  
HARARE LONDON MAURITIUS NAIROBI



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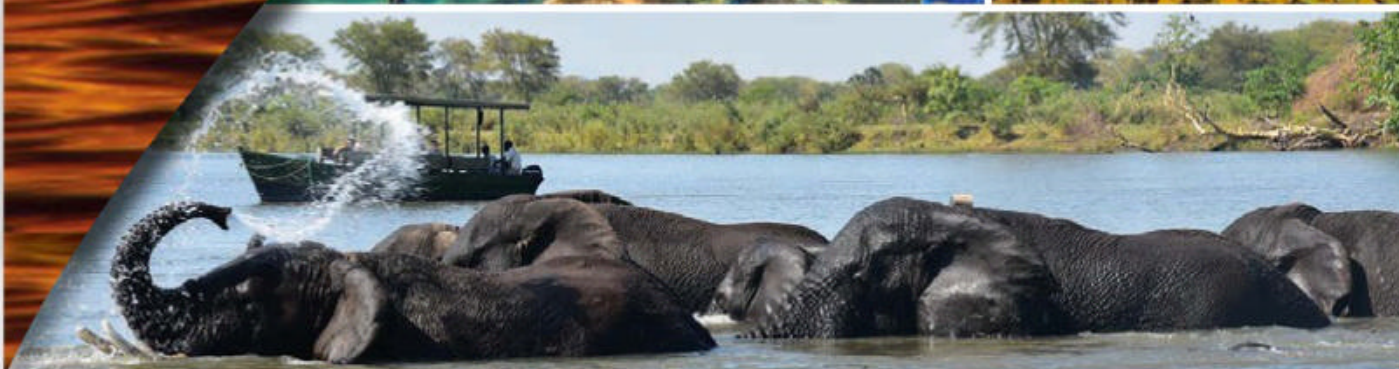
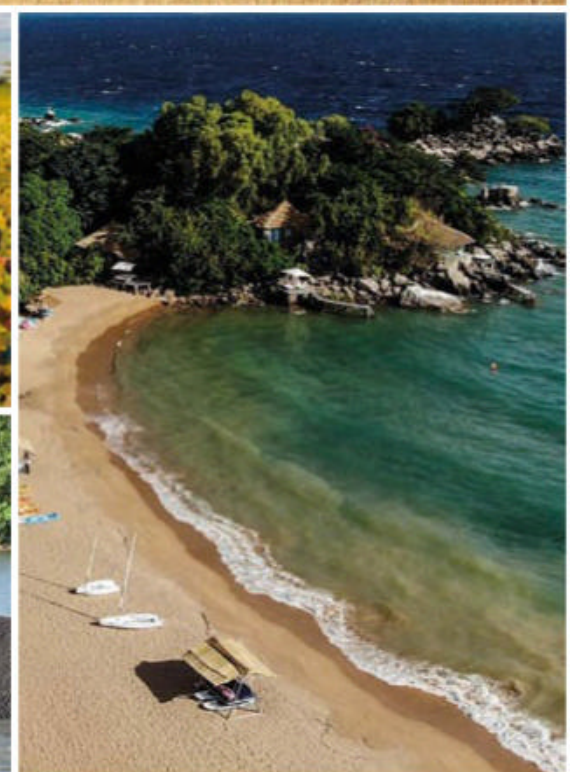
**Muli bwanji?** Welcome to Malawi, a hidden gem renowned for its friendly people and diverse attractions, offering a compact bush and beach destination to reward every visitor.

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# WHERE?

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**With a continent so vast, it can feel overwhelming to figure out where you should** go for your wildlife-watching adventure. Many countries have a well-developed network of parks and reserves, while others offer a more raw wilderness experience. Most boast a multitude of appealing options, meaning you'll have choices to make and compromises to be at peace with. Some travellers like to return to familiar territory, drawing on past safaris to enrich the new. Others prefer to seek fresh pastures, perhaps lured by different habitats or the prospect of seeing specific species. In the following pages we hope to help you to narrow down the places that might most intrigue you. →

**On the way:** Meerkat adult babysitting two one-month old pups, Kalahari, Botswana





# THE B!G PICTURE: UNDERSTANDING A DESTINATION

East and southern Africa's main safari destinations all offer an enticing range of parks and reserves, together with non-wildlife activities such as beaches and cultural sites. When considering which country or countries to visit, the choice can be overwhelming. And once you've decided on one, you still need to wade through the myriad options within it. Travel writer and guide book author **Philip Briggs** has traversed Africa over the course of the last 35 years. Since few people have such extensive experience, we thought we'd ask him for some pointers to help with the process of assessing a destination – and for an overview of each main safari country.

## **Q WHAT MAKES A 'GOOD' SAFARI DESTINATION? WHAT COMBINATION OF FACTORS SHOULD WE BE LOOKING FOR?**

For most first-time visitors to Africa, it's about seeing lots of iconic wildlife (big cats, elephant, buffalo, rhino, giraffe, hippo, zebra, warthog and wildebeest) without requiring too many long flights and drives. Repeat visitors might have more specialised priorities – birding, or looking for rarer creatures such as wild dog – and they tend to favour quality sightings over quantity. If we can be picky, an ideal safari destination will offer the opportunity to supplement game drives with guided walks, canoeing, boat trips and other such activities. That said, there's no such thing as a 'bad' safari destination; they all have merit, though in some cases it might be quite esoteric.

## **Q FOR GUIDEBOOK RESEARCH, YOU TEND TO TRAVEL AROUND THE WHOLE COUNTRY. WHAT SUGGESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR READERS WITH A MORE LIMITED TIME FRAME?**

Do as I say and not as I do. My trips tend to be fast-paced and involve a lot of restless lodge-hopping. But if I were planning a recreational safari, the minimum stay in most cases would be three nights, allowing me to relax and get to know the area, and cutting down the number of travel days.

For those who enjoy slow travel, many large parks are so diverse you could dedicate an entire vacation to them. Two weeks, for instance, would be the minimum I'd allocate to self-driving from southern to northern Kruger, and I could

easily spend a similar period exploring the various corners of the Serengeti.

## **Q YOU HEAR OF NATIONAL PARKS, GAME RESERVES, PRIVATE RESERVES, CONSERVANCIES... THEY ALL TEND TO BLUR INTO ONE. WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM, AND SHOULD I CARE?**

These distinctions are more bureaucratic than ecological. Usually, national parks and game reserves are state-owned, whereas private reserves lie on private land, and conservancies are leased from local communities. As a rule (albeit with many exceptions), state-managed parks and reserves carry higher tourist volumes than private reserves and conservancies, and they are more restrictive when it comes to things like night drives and off-road driving, but they tend to be cheaper and to allow self-drivers.

Conservancies leased from local communities usually have the strongest grassroots support. For this reason, many visitors to Kenya, for instance, prefer to stay in conservancies on the Laikipia Plateau, or bordering the Maasai Mara or Amboseli, than in national parks and reserves. Note, however, that this is a slightly simplistic equation – if everybody stopped visiting any given national park at the expense of smaller buffering conservancies, the entire ecosystem might collapse – and many state-run and private parks work closely with and/or allocate a proportion of revenue to surrounding communities.

## **Q WHEN FACED WITH ALL THIS CHOICE, IF I WAS TO NARROW DOWN TWO OR THREE OPTIONS, WHAT SHOULD I THINK ABOUT WHEN SELECTING WILDLIFE PARKS?**

That depends on your priorities. In Uganda, for instance, almost everyone wants to track gorillas in Bwindi or Mgahinga, but other choices might depend on whether your main interest is primates, plains wildlife or birdwatching.

Another factor might be previous experience. For a first time safarigoer, the Maasai Mara would probably top the list of Kenya's most alluring destinations, but a →

### **Stalking the herd:**

Buffaloes on the periphery try to keep a pride of hunting lions at bay, Okavango Delta









ONCE YOU'RE  
ON THE ROAD,  
SO LONG AS  
YOU ENJOY THE  
PLACES YOU  
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BE GLAD YOU  
RESISTED THE  
TEMPTATION  
TO CRAM IN  
EVERYTHING

more experienced African traveller might prioritise seeing Grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffe and other localised dry-country specials in Samburu-Buffalo Springs or Laikipia.

In Zambia, an extended canoeing trip in Lower Zambezi or foot safari in South or North Luangwa might top your wish list. Another factor might be the desire to incorporate several different landscapes and experiences into a relatively compact area, for instance by combining Victoria Falls, Hwange and Matobo Hills in western Zimbabwe.

### **Q THERE'S A TEMPTATION TO FOCUS ON THE MOST POPULAR PARKS. IS THAT SENSIBLE?**

Not necessarily. Few first-time visitors to Tanzania would omit the Serengeti or Ngorongoro Crater from their itinerary, and rightly so. Having said that, 'popular' can be synonymous with 'crowded' – Ngorongoro being an obvious case in point. So you'd get more of a wilderness experience by visiting lesser known parks such as Ruaha or Katavi. Alternatively you could pepper your itinerary with a few off-the-beaten-track side visits, for instance by exploring the little-visited but gorgeous Empakai Crater from Ngorongoro.

If you're visiting Namibia, there's no substitute for Etosha as a wildlife-viewing destination. Likewise, in Botswana, the Okavango is an absolute must-see. In Zambia, by contrast, there's a strong case for choosing Lower Zambezi or North Luangwa over the more popular South Luangwa. And even in some very popular large parks, including Kruger and Serengeti, there remain sectors that are little visited but very rewarding.

### **Q WHAT NON-SAFARI FACTORS SHOULD I LOOK AT WHEN CHOOSING A DESTINATION?**

Dedicating an entire vacation to a safari might feel like overkill. So think about your other interests too. If wining and dining are your thing, South Africa is ideal, possibly combining Greater Kruger with Cape Town and the Winelands. If Victoria Falls tops your bucket list, head to Zambia or Zimbabwe. For mountain gorillas, go to Uganda or Rwanda. Tanzania offers Zanzibar for beach interest or you could tackle Kilimanjaro.

### **Q HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE TRAVEL LOGISTICS WHEN LOOKING AT COMBINATIONS OF ATTRACTIONS?**

Crucial. In most countries, you'll be compromising between cramming in all the highlights and keeping driving or flying distances manageable. In Tanzania, for instance, once you've settled on a Serengeti/Ngorongoro-focused safari, it makes sense to tag on nearby Lake Manyara or Tarangire (both ecologically very different, as it happens) rather than the more far-flung likes of Nyerere/Selous or Mahale.

South Africa is extreme in this regard due to its

immense variety. One of my favourite trips here involves self-driving through Kgalagadi, Augrabies and Namaqualand in the Northern Cape, but you need at least ten days to do this, so while it would work perfectly with a few nights in Cape Town, this would preclude visiting other parts of the country in the course of an ordinary vacation.

### **Q WHAT'S THE ONE BIT OF ADVICE YOU'D GIVE ABOUT WHERE TO GO ON SAFARI?**

Do some independent research before you contact a tour operator. The internet is a great starting point for making initial decisions about which country or countries you want to visit, but when it comes to in-depth advice about a specific destination, you're better off reading a dedicated guidebook or magazine, talking to a specialist operator, or both.

### **Q HOW DO I MAKE PEACE WITH OMITTING SOME GREAT PARKS FROM MY ITINERARY?**

It's a fact of life. And once you're on the road, so long as you enjoy the places you do visit (and you will), you'll be glad you resisted the temptation to cram in everything and opted for a more relaxed itinerary.

### **Q HOW DO COVID AND MALARIA INFLUENCE THESE DECISIONS?**

Malaria is a risk in most safari destinations, though it is greatly reduced by taking prophylactics and avoiding rainy seasons. If you prefer not to take that risk, then your country of choice should almost certainly be South Africa, which mostly lies outside the tropics and boasts some excellent malaria-free reserves.

In many respects, an African safari is the perfect Covid-era vacation, since it is very outdoor-oriented and involves limited close contact with other people. However, on my recent trip to Zambia in November 2021, I met some people whose itineraries included several countries and numerous land or air border crossings, each of which required a PCR test. Personally, I'd rather focus on one or maybe two countries and spare myself the hassle. 

#### **Colour me beautiful:**

The southern carmine bee eater is a migratory bird, spending the breeding season (August to November) in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana before moving further south and returning to Equatorial Africa from March to August. It is a popular sighting at nesting sites in South Luangwa (pictured), Mana Pools, Lower Zambezi and Chobe national parks







**SOUTH AFRICA**

# LAND OF **PLENTY**

As a wildlife-viewing destination, South Africa stands out for its DIY-friendly national parks, excellent network of private (and in most cases malaria-free) reserves, and high level of endemism. And such is its range of other attractions that you could visit this biodiverse country ten times and still keep finding worthwhile new sights.

**MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS**

Kruger is probably the last remaining park to support viable populations of all of Africa's iconic species. Second to none as a self-drive safari destination, its parks share open borders with several superb private reserves. Malaria-free destinations include Madikwe and Pilanesberg in Northwest Province, and Addo and KwanDwe in Eastern Cape.

**MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE**

I've enjoyed some mind-

boggling leopard encounters at MalaMala, Sabi Sand and elsewhere in Greater Kruger. That said, if marine wildlife counts, I might nominate the engaging penguin colony at Boulders Beach or land-based whale-watching at nearby Hermanus.

**SECRET WILDLIFE-WATCHING GEMS**

A personal favourite is Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, whose vast desert landscape of apricot dunes and acacia-lined riverbeds is inhabited by high densities

of lion, leopard, cheetah and raptors. I also love exploring the reserves of northern KwaZulu-Natal, which include Hluhluwe-iMfolozi, iSimangaliso Wetlands and Phinda.

**OTHER ATTRACTIONS**

The list is endless. For many visitors it would be topped by Cape Town and the surrounding winelands. But there are also the lofty peaks and rock art sites of uKhahlamba-Drakensberg, the beaches and forests of the Garden Route, and a wealth of cultural and historic attractions





#### Go bokke:

A herd of springbok – South Africa's national animal – run through the Kalahari, Northern Cape

RICHARD DU TOIT / MINDEN / NATUREPL.COM

#### WILDERNESS FACTOR

In most respects, South Africa is the most westernized of African countries. That said, Greater Kruger, despite its tar roads and well-organised rest camps, remains a vast wilderness where wildlife is free to roam. Many other remote areas – the thinly populated badlands of the **Northern Cape**, for instance – retain a definite wilderness feel.

including Johannesburg's Apartheid Museum and the Cradle of Humankind.

#### LOGISTICAL FACTORS

Although organised tours are available, South Africa is particularly attractive to backpackers, self-drivers and other independent-minded travellers. If you plan your own trip, resist the temptation to cram in too many highlights, rather work on the basis that you can always return one day – South Africa attracts a high proportion of repeat visitors.

*Frail? Elderly? Pregnant? A child? Think a safari isn't for you? Think again. South Africa has a plethora of malaria-free areas for you to enjoy watching wildlife in without fear of mosquitos. Plus, you can combine your safari with a host of other activities – beach, hiking, mountains, culture, fine foods and wine, history... In the northernmost Kruger, Pafuri is home to nearly 80 per cent of the park's biodiversity. It's known for amazing birdlife, walking safaris, dramatic landscapes and baobabs.*

**SANDY WOOD**, PULSE AFRICA



## ESWATINI

# A WILD KINGDOM

*Eswatini is a small and compact kingdom, yet has a diverse range of habitats and wildlife all within an hour of each other. Want to get away from the crowds of Kruger? Then Eswatini is the place for you.*

*Mlilwane Wildlife Sanctuary is a great place to start. Three nights is ideal to explore the reserve on the self-guided walking and bike trails, or even on horseback. In the evening snuggle around the campfire with the resident warthogs. Then onto Mbuluzi Game Reserve where you can stay in your own self-catered lodge. Wake up to the prospect of giraffe walking through camp and crested guinea fowl calling through the trees.*

*Lastly, spend three nights at Hlane Royal National Park, famous for its white rhino population. Join the rhino drive and if you are lucky, track them on foot for an adrenaline-filled and memorable experience. End the day with a sunset safari to see elephant and lion – often close to your vehicle, and watch the setting sun through the knobthorn acacia trees.*

**JENNY BOWEN**, SENSE EARTH



JONATHAN RAMAEL





## NAMIBIA

# DESERT-ADAPTED DIVERSITY

Vying with Western Sahara as Africa's most sparsely populated country, Namibia is a desiccated land of towering dunes, vast night skies and long sun-baked roads. Arguably more about wide-open spaces than wildlife, it does incorporate one of Africa's most legendary safari destinations in the form of Etosha National Park.

### MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS

The big one is Etosha. Named after an extinct lake of shimmering salt flats, this massive park is renowned for the diverse wildlife – lion, leopard, cheetah, elephant, black rhino, giraffe, greater kudu and the rare black-faced impala – that tends to gather at its waterholes. For self-drivers, Etosha is one of the few parks outside South Africa that can safely be explored in an ordinary saloon car. Neighbouring Ongava is a private reserve offering a luxury guided fly-in alternative to the national park.

### MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE

The sight of a rapier-horned oryx tramping along the crest of one of Namibia's trademark rippled dunes is truly unforgettable.

### SECRET WILDLIFE-WATCHING GEMS

The unique desert-adapted elephants and black rhinos of Damaraland can be tracked on foot at a pair of remote community

conservancies. For more budget conscious hikers, Waterberg is a scenic sandstone massif that offers a rare opportunity to track cheetah, white rhino, giraffe and various antelope on foot.

### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

These include the towering red dunes of Sossusvlei, the time-warped German architecture of Swakopmund and Lüderitz, the 200,000-strong seal colony at Cape Cross, the superb rock art of Brandberg and Twyfelfontein, and the immense Fish River Canyon.

### LOGISTICAL FACTORS

There's no better way to experience Namibia's wide open spaces than a self-drive road trip, though if you're restricted to a normal-length vacation, that would force you to focus on the south or the north, but not both. A more efficient option for those with limited time is to fly between highlights.

### WILDERNESS FACTOR

Very high, wherever you travel.

### Iconic sight:

An oryx on the dunes at Sossusvlei. Oryx extract water from fruit and vegetables such as the tsamma melon to maximise water intake and concentrate their urine to decrease water output



Namibia is served largely by a network of well-maintained gravel roads, but covering 200 miles is likely to take twice as long as you expect. Decide where you really want to explore, rather than trying to do too much. Take an extra night at each destination to avoid arriving only in time to leave the following morning.

**EXPERT TIP**

**DAVID CARTWRIGHT**,  
ATI HOLIDAYS



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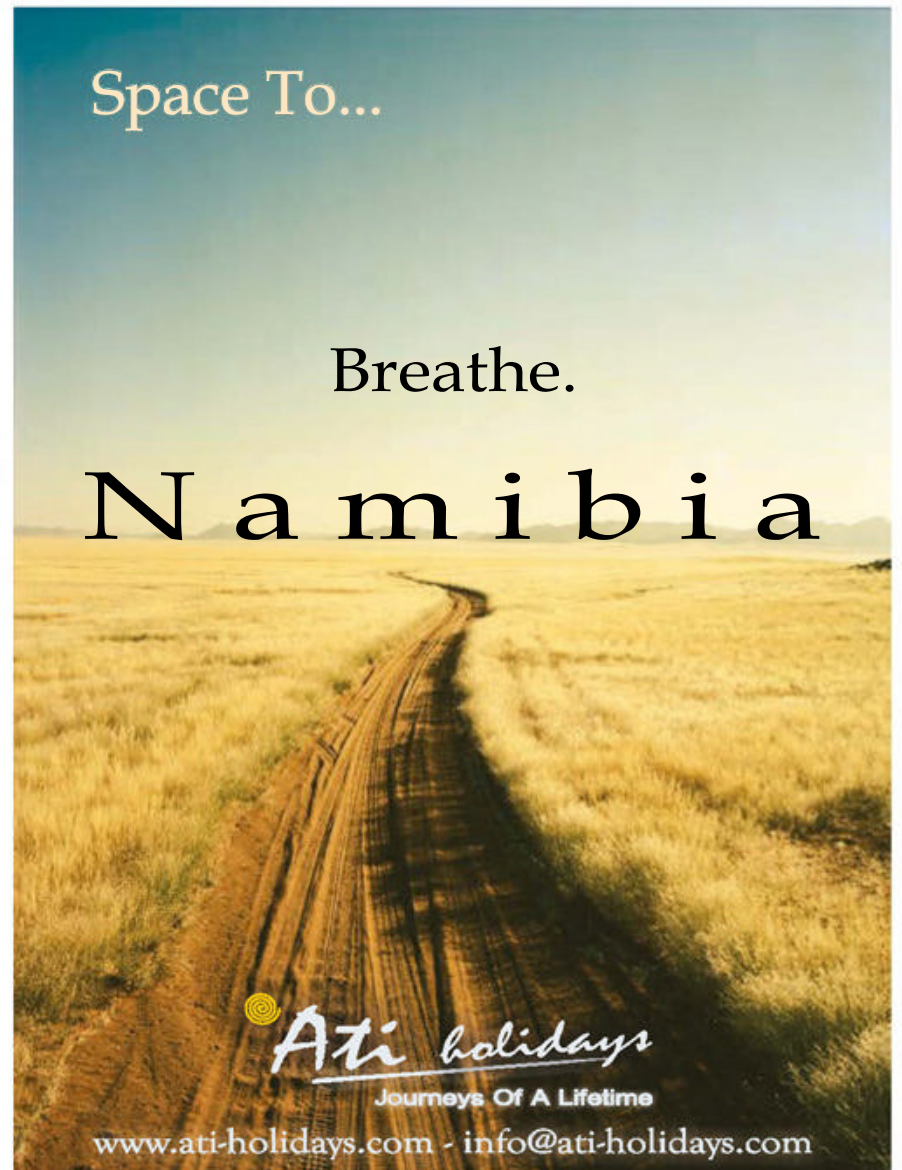
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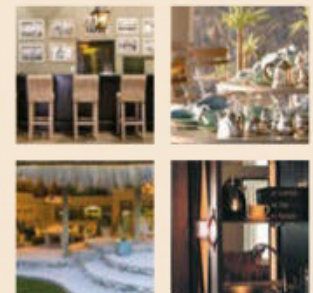
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**WILDERNESS  
FACTOR**

It doesn't get much more wild than Botswana. The only place where you might experience some crowding is along the stretch of the Chobe River immediately west of Kasane.

**Making a  
splash:**

A female red lechwe in the Selinda Reserve

**BOTSWANA**

## BOUNDLESS CONTRASTS

Thinly-inhabited Botswana is truly great safari destination, where the watery wonders of the Okavango Delta and riverine delights of Chobe National Park contrast with the semi-arid expanse of the Kalahari.

**MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE  
DESTINATIONS**

Protected in Moremi Game Reserve and a mosaic of private concessions, the perennial swamps of Okavango form one of Africa's most iconic and unique safari destinations. Chobe is another vast and equally alluring park, known not only for its immense concentrations of elephants, but also as the only place where lions regularly hunt these giant herbivores.

**MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE  
EXPERIENCE**

It's a toss-up between dentist-

eye views of hippos as you're poled through the Okavango in a *mokoro*, or counting elephants (Botswana hosts an incredible one-third of Africa's total population) on a motorboat trip along the Chobe River.

**SECRET WILDLIFE-  
WATCHING GEMS**

The 52,800sq km Central Kalahari stands high on the bucket list of many southern African 4x4 enthusiasts. Here, Deception Valley supports surprising concentrations of grazers in the rainy season, and it's a popular hunting

ground for the Kalahari's famous black-maned lions.

**OTHER ATTRACTIONS**

These include the rock art of Tsodilo Hills and blinding salt pans of Makgadikgadi. However, the non-wildlife attraction most often tagged onto a Botswana safari is Victoria Falls, which lies on the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe 90 minutes' drive from the main gate to Chobe.

**LOGISTICAL FACTORS**

Within the time span of a normal vacation, Botswana is best explored by flying between camps and other destinations. Both Okavango and Chobe are divided up into several very different sectors and private concessions, so study your options carefully. With Okavango, camps deeper in the swamps tend to focus on mokoro safaris while more peripheral ones are better for terrestrial game drives; the ideal itinerary would combine three nights in one of each.

*Combine the Victoria Falls with the Selinda Reserve and the pans of Makgadikgadi. These three different biomes give you a complete overview of the diversity Botswana has to offer, while the falls are not to be missed. Spending time in one of the exclusive concessions such as Zarafa affords privileged access to some of the best wildlife in Africa.*



**WILL BOLSOVER,**  
NATURAL WORLD  
SAFARIS





#### WILDERNESS FACTOR

**Mana Pools** and **Gonarezhou** rank among southern Africa's most exciting wilderness destinations. The public part of Hwange feels slightly tamer, but the south-eastern and northern concessions possess a strong wilderness feel.

**Pack performance:** Mana Pools (pictured) and Hwange are among the most reliable places for sightings of wild dogs

## DIVERSE HABITATS

Zimbabwe ranks among the most alluring of safari destinations. In addition to a trio of world-class parks, it boasts a pair of UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Victoria Falls and Great Zimbabwe) that I'd include in any shortlist of sub-Saharan Africa's must-see non-wildlife attractions.

#### MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS

Hwange is Zimbabwe's most popular safari destination, thanks to its dense wildlife populations (particularly elephant) and proximity to Victoria Falls. Mana Pools offers walking safaris and canoe trips on the Zambezi, while Gonarezhou is a surprisingly scenic reserve that supports 10,000 elephants and plenty of other wildlife, including wild dog.

#### MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE

Canoeing and walking in

Mana Pools provides a thrilling opportunity to come face to face with the likes of lion, elephant and hippo, unimpeded by physical barriers or the distraction of a running engine.

#### SECRET WILDLIFE-WATCHING GEMS

Matobo Hills National Park is notable for its impressive boulderscapes, ancient rock art, and dense populations of rhino, leopard and black eagle.

#### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Victoria Falls is the most spectacular attraction of its

type in Africa, as are the daily whitewater rafting trips that run through the Zambezi Gorge below. The ruined stone city of Great Zimbabwe is focused on a Great Enclosure whose patterned stone walls and tall conical tower date to the 14th century. Nyanga National Park, Bvumba and Chirinda Forest Reserve lie in the Eastern Highlands, a mountainous region that offers much to hikers and birdwatchers.

#### LOGISTICAL FACTORS

Zimbabwe is relatively small by African standards, and roads are generally good, but still you can't squeeze everything into a 10-14 day itinerary. The combination of Victoria Falls, Hwange and Matobo Hills works well, as does Mana Pools and Kariba, but you'll likely need to fly to Mana Pools from Victoria Falls. Gonarezhou, combines well with Great Zimbabwe and the Eastern Highlands.

*For unique, off-the-grid experiences, look at some of the smaller, owner-run operators, or the lesser-known national parks, such as Chizarira or Gonarezhou. By visiting the more remote parks, not only will you find a more rewarding wildlife experience, but you will be contributing directly to their preservation.*



**SHELLEY COX,**  
AFRICA CONSERVATION  
TRAVEL



**WILDERNESS  
FACTOR**

This is highest in **Nyika**, thanks to its size and remote location. Malawi's other parks don't suffer from overcrowding, but they are relatively contained and surrounded by settlements.

**Wild waters:**

Guests from Mvuu Lodge enjoy a boat ride on the Shire – a highlight of a visit to Liwonde National Park

**MALAWI**

## A COMPACT LITTLE GEM

Traditionally, tourism to Malawi has been dominated by backpackers attracted to the laidback resorts that line its eponymous Rift Valley lake. However, following the recent rehabilitation of Liwonde, Majete and Nkhatakota under the management of African Parks, the country also doubles as an emergent safari destination.

**MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE  
DESTINATIONS**

Ever since I first visited it in 1995, I've rated Liwonde as Africa's finest second division park, thanks largely to the magical presence of the palm-lined Shire River. Today, both Liwonde and Majete rank as top drawer safari destinations, thanks to an ambitious programme of reintroductions that ensure visitors are likely to see most of the 'Big Five'.

**MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE  
EXPERIENCE**

Boat trips on the Shire River as it flows through Liwonde are unforgettable: expect astounding hippo densities, plentiful elephants and a dazzling selection of aquatic birds,

**SECRET WILDLIFE-  
WATCHING GEMS**

Malawi's largest and most remote national park, Nyika protects a vast undulating hiker-

friendly plateau that's home to leopard, elephant, zebra, roan antelope, eland and the endangered wattled crane. A visit is easily combined with Vwaza Marsh, a lowland reserve where you can expect to see hippo, elephant, buffalo and a wealth of aquatic birds.

**OTHER ATTRACTIONS**

In two words: Lake Malawi. This legendary chill-out venue is lined with resorts to suit all tastes and budgets, from the barefoot luxury of Kaya Mawa on remote Likoma Island to the vibey villages of Nkhata Bay and Cape Maclear.

**LOGISTICAL FACTORS**

Although Malawi's parks are quite spread out, it is a smallish country and you could quite easily cover the main ones by road over the course of an ordinary vacation.

*Ask how the seasons will influence your trip. This is true of almost anywhere, but the distinctions between the seasons in Malawi are particularly significant. Each has some special points of interest. For example: game viewing is best from July to October, although the Nyika Plateau is better from November to May.*



**CHRIS BADGER,**  
CENTRAL AFRICAN  
WILDERNESS SAFARIS



## MOZAMBIQUE

# RUGGED BUSH AND MARINE MEGAFAUNA

Boasting Africa's longest stretch of tropical Indian Ocean frontage, Mozambique is renowned for its gorgeous beaches and diverse marine fauna, but it also offers some intriguing off-the-beaten-track safari opportunities.

### MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS

Having undergone extensive rehabilitation in recent years, Gorongosa now supports large herds of grazers plus elephant, buffalo and lion. Maputo Special Reserve is one of the few remaining places where you might see elephants on the beach.

### MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE

Swimming with manta rays, whale sharks and giant turtles on an ocean safari out of Tofo.

### SECRET WILDLIFE- WATCHING GEMS

The 42,000sq km Niassa Reserve is among Africa's three biggest conservation areas, and probably the most remote safari destination I've visited.

It supports large numbers of elephant, buffalo, lion and wild dog, but following the closure of its only fly-in lodge, tourist amenities are limited to a single community camp aimed at self-sufficient 4x4ers, and bespoke mobile safaris.

### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Mozambique's beach resorts offer wonderful snorkelling and diving. The characterful port of Ilha do Moçambique is a former Portuguese capital whose historic landmarks include the oldest fortress and church in southern Africa, both constructed in the 16th century.

### LOGISTICAL FACTORS

Most visitors fly in to Gorongosa, but its location off the main road between Zimbabwe and Beira make it reasonably accessible to self-drivers. More accessible still, Maputo Special Reserve lies a short drive south of Mozambique's eponymous capital. By contrast, Niassa is suited only to the most intrepid of travellers.

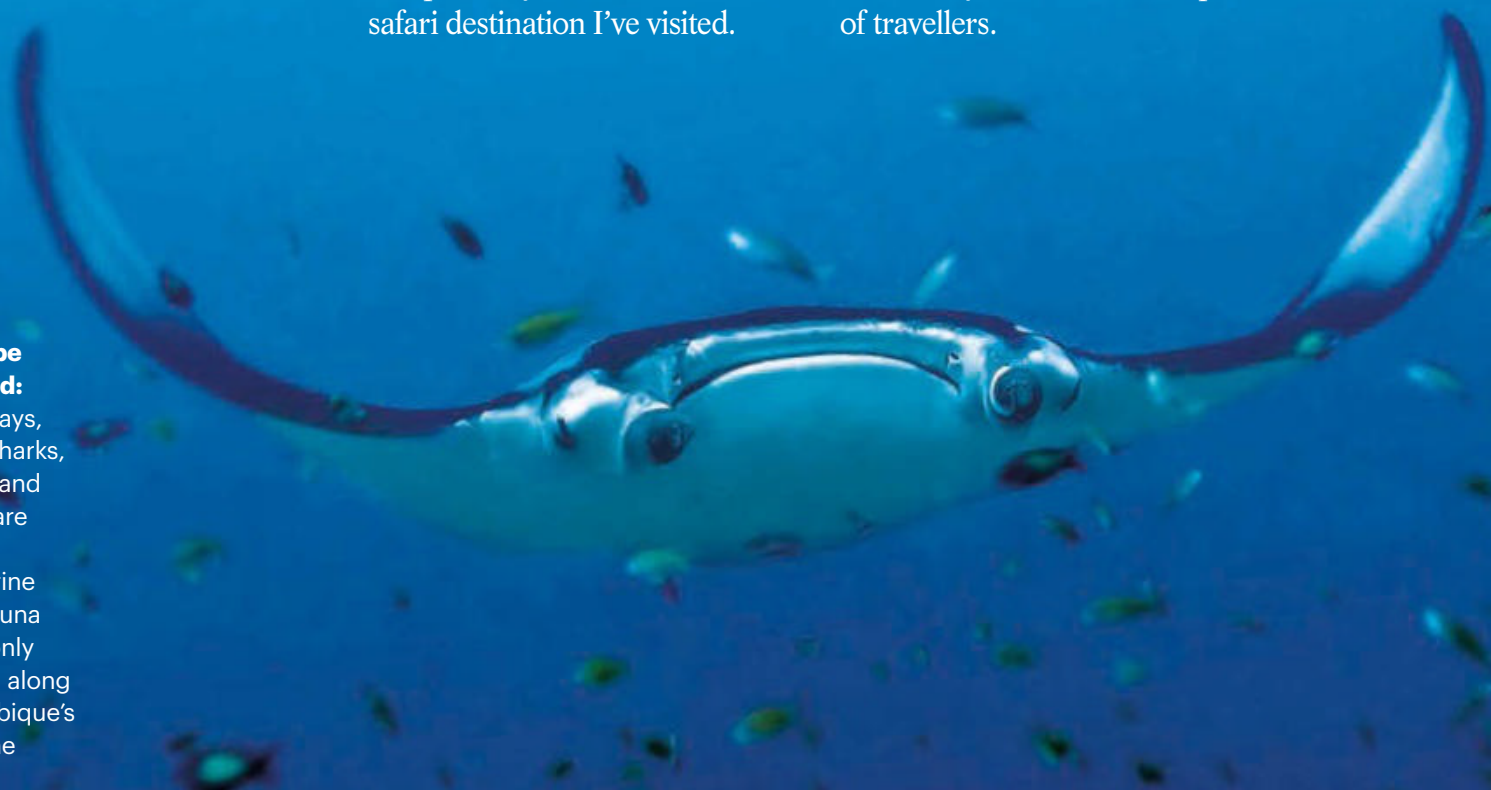
*Seasons are of huge relevance. The whale season runs from July to October, but this is also the windy season – so visibility for diving is not so good. The best time for diving is from April to June. If you are a keen diver, I would also pick a location where you can dive from the beach, such as Nuarro.*

**MIKE VARDELL,**  
CRAFTED AFRICA



### Sea to be believed:

Manta rays, whale sharks, whales and turtles are among the marine megafauna commonly spotted along Mozambique's coastline





**ZAMBIA**

# BIG PARKS, BIG GAME

Tailormade for safari connoisseurs seeking a true wilderness experience, Zambia is renowned as a specialist destination for canoeing and walking safaris, and for offering exceptional big cat viewing.

## MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS

Most popular is South Luangwa, which offers excellent all-round wildlife viewing and expertly guided walking safaris. Even better, in my opinion, is Lower Zambezi, where you can canoe or boat along southern Africa's largest and wildest river, enjoying a passing parade of yawning hippos, colourful birds and foraging

buffalos and elephants. Other major safari destinations include Kafue and North Luangwa national parks.

## MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE

Until recently, I'd have said leopard viewing, with South Luangwa and Lower Zambezi in particular ranking among the most reliable places to see these elusive cats. However, the stand-out memory of my most recent trip to Zambia was a succession of quality encounters with the rare African wild dog in four different national parks: Lower Zambezi, South Luangwa, North Luangwa and Kafue.

## SECRET WILDLIFE-WATCHING GEMS

Serviced by a handful of small camps that focus on walking safaris, North Luangwa hosts a similarly impressive range of wildlife to its southern namesake, and it's the only Zambian refuge of the endangered black rhino. Elsewhere, Liuwa Plain is traversed by the world's second largest wildebeest migration, Kasanka is famed for its staggering

seasonal fruit bat concentrations (up to 12 million in one forest), while Bangweulu offers the opportunity to pole through atmospheric swamps in search of Africa's most southerly shoebill population.

## OTHER ATTRACTIONS

The magnificent Victoria Falls is the world's largest single sheet of falling water. Below the falls, a gorge punctuated by Grade 4-5 rapids offers thrilling white-water rafting.

## LOGISTICAL FACTORS

Unless you have a reliable 4x4 and plenty of time on your hands, you'll almost certainly fly between reserves and should allow at least three nights at any given camp. A good itinerary for first-time visitors would focus on Victoria Falls, Lower Zambezi and South and/or North Luangwa. It's also worth visiting Kafue, the country's largest national park, but study your options carefully, as the different sectors offer very different experiences (see also page 74).

## WILDERNESS FACTOR

All Zambia's parks possess a strong wilderness feel. Exceptions are Victoria Falls, where large numbers of tourists are difficult to avoid, and perhaps the busy game-viewing circuit immediately inside South Luangwa's Mfuwe Bridge Gate.

**EXPERT TIP**  
*Consider camps located within the official boundaries of national parks; they tend to be quieter and save you wasting time on transfers. Guides are the most critical component, so check the guiding level offered.*

**LESLIE NEVISON,**  
MAMA TEMBO TOURS

**Camera shy:** South Luangwa is one of the best parks in Africa for good sightings of leopards





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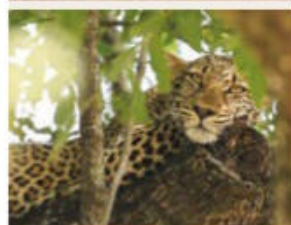
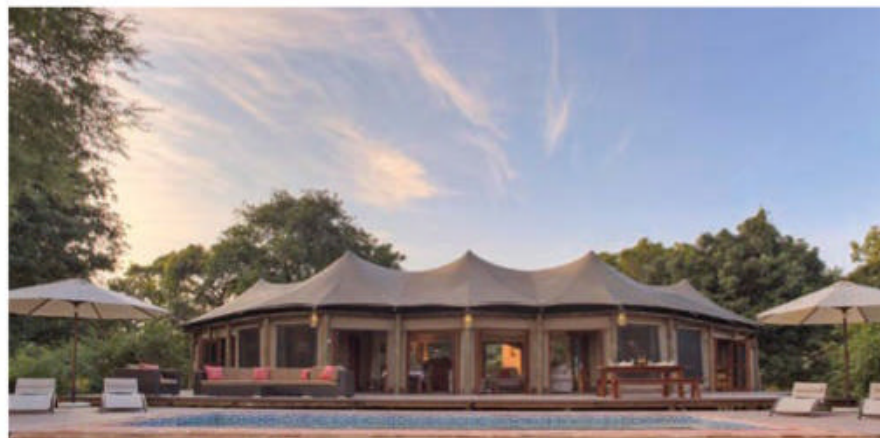
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TANZANIA

# AN ABUNDANCE OF RICHES

Serengeti, Kilimanjaro, Zanzibar, Ngorongoro Crater, Gombe, Selous, Lake Victoria... no other country hosts quite so many African travel icons as Tanzania, or matches it in variety and scope as arguably the ultimate safari destination.

## MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS

Where do I start? Serengeti and Ngorongoro, home to the world's most spectacular wildlife migration, should feature near the top of any safari wish list. The more southerly Ruaha and Nyerere (formerly Selous) National Parks are both even larger than the Serengeti. Other major safari-oriented parks include Lake Manyara, Tarangire, Arusha, Mikumi and Katavi.

## MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE

The wildebeest migration through the Serengeti is punctuated by highlights: the mass calving in February, the adrenaline-charged surge across the Grumeti River in June/July, and the multiple crossings of the

Mara when the animals disperse north over July to October.

## SECRET WILDLIFE-WATCHING GEMS

An exclusive Maasai community conservancy, West Kilimanjaro is the only place in Tanzania where you can see elephants at the base of snow-capped Kilimanjaro. More remotely, forested Mahale Mountains and Gombe Stream, on the shore of Lake Tanganyika, both offer the opportunity to track chimpanzee communities first habituated in the 1960s.

## OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Many visitors to Tanzania follow a safari with a few days' downtime on Zanzibar or other Indian Ocean islands such as Pemba or Mafia. At the other

end of the energy scale, the tough but non-technical ascent of Kilimanjaro requires at least five days – better six or seven.

## LOGISTICAL FACTORS

Long distances and rough roads mean that Tanzania is very much geared towards organised safaris, though self-drive exploration is possible. If you're spending up to a week on safari, you should choose between the popular northern circuit (Serengeti, Ngorongoro, Tarangire and Manyara), the more low-key southern circuit (Nyerere and Ruaha) and the remote western circuit (Katavi, Mahale and Gombe). Unless you've a lot of time on your hands, the reserves on the southern and western circuits are essentially fly-in destinations. We would recommend allocating at least 10 days to any safari that combines reserves on two different circuits.



*The chance of having a poor game drive in Tanzania is almost impossible. To avoid the crowds in the more popular parks, ask your guide to go in the opposite direction from other vehicles. Guides love it because it shows that you are serious about seeing wildlife...*

**CHRIS BREEN,**  
WILDLIFE  
WORLDWIDE

## WILDERNESS FACTOR

Ngorongoro Crater tends to become crowded in the mid-to-late morning. Its uniqueness, and its inherently confined nature, mean there's no way around this, though it's usually quieter in the late afternoon. Otherwise, Tanzania's main parks are generally large enough to accommodate reasonable tourist volumes. For a more private safari experience in the Serengeti ecosystem, try the Loliondo conservancies or private Grumeti Singita Reserve.



**Lion king:**  
The big cats take pride of place in the Serengeti ecosystem





## MADAGASCAR

# A PLACE LIKE NOWHERE ELSE

Vastly different to any destination on mainland Africa, Madagascar is an immense Indian Ocean island renowned for its endemic flora and fauna, which includes more than 100 types of loveable lemur, and even more unique bird species.

### MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS

Madagascar's network of 50-plus national parks and other conservation areas practically all offer guided walks in search of endemic lemurs, chameleons and birds. If you visit only one, Andasibe-Mantadia ranks highly in terms of diversity, amenities and proximity to the capital Antananarivo, and it's the best place to see the iconic indri. Other popular parks include Ranamofana, Amber Mountain and Isalo.

### MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE

Tracking indris in Andasibe-

Mantadia. These panda lookalikes are the largest of the island's lemurs, but their most remarkable attribute is a chilling banshee-on-helium call that reverberates eerily through the forest.

### SECRET WILDLIFE-WATCHING GEMS

The surreal spiny desert (or spiny forest) of the Mandrare Valley is populated by bizarre succulents, charming ring-necked lemurs, 'dancing' Verreaux's sifakas, and a wealth of endemic dry-country birds. The jungle of Masoala Peninsula, protected in Madagascar's largest national park, provides sanctuary to 15 lemur species and such iconic birds as the helmet vanga and Madagascar serpent eagle.

### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Non-wildlife highlights include the idyllic Indian Ocean beaches of Nosy Be, the historic Imerina palaces of Antananarivo and nearby Ambohimanga Royal Hill (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), the photogenic Avenue of Baobabs near Morondava, and the surreal tsingy rock formations of Bemaraha and Ankarana.

### LOGISTICAL FACTORS

Poor roads and an unpredictable domestic flight network can make Madagascar a challenging destination, so it's important to ensure your itinerary isn't overambitious.

### WILDERNESS FACTOR

Although the island is quite densely populated, and slash-and-burn deforestation is a major issue, most parks retain a genuine wilderness character, not least because they can only be explored on foot.

#### Future watch:

The ring-tailed lemur is one of the more common of the 107 species of lemur, 33 of which are critically endangered

*The popular perception is that the best time to visit is October, but I've found wildlife watching just as rewarding from the beginning of September through to December.*

*There's another brilliant wildlife window, though, from end-March to April, just after the rains. April is especially good for herpetofauna.*



**DEREK SCHUURMAN,**  
RAINBOW TOURS





KEREN SU / CHINA SPAN / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



KENYA

**Demanding attention:**

Gerenuk are among the dr-country ungulates that make Samburu-Buffero Springs so appealing

**WILDERNESS FACTOR**

Kenya's main parks are at their busiest during the wildebeest migration in the Maasai Mara. To avoid the crowds at this time, choose a camp in a neighbouring Maasai-owned conservancy. Or head to Laikipia, Tsavo or Meru, none of which feel over-touristed.

## SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

The original home of the safari, Kenya is a classic bush-and-beach destination where world-famous reserves such as the Maasai Mara and Amboseli lie inland of an idyllic Indian Ocean coastline.

**MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS**

The Maasai Mara tops the list for its superb lion, cheetah and leopard viewing, supplemented by the presence of the wildebeest migration over July to September. Relatively untrammelled Tsavo is another good big game destination, while Amboseli offers exceptional elephant viewing at the base of Kilimanjaro, and Laikipia supports some of East Africa's most rewarding private reserves and concessions.

**MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE**

It's tempting to single out the Mara wildebeest migration, or

the million-strong flamingo flocks associated with Lakes Nakuru and Bogoria. But for me, it would have to be the unique dry-country ungulates – Grevy's zebra, reticulated giraffe, gerenuk, Beisa oryx and so on – that roam the northern badlands of Samburu-Buffero Springs.

**SECRET WILDLIFE-WATCHING GEMS**

I've always enjoyed visiting Meru, which attracts surprisingly low tourist volumes for a bona fide 'Big Five' park. Shimba Hills is easily visited as a day trip from the coastal resorts around Mombasa, and supports Kenya's only population of sable antelope,

along with elephant, buffalo and giraffe. Another underrated gem, particularly for birders, is Kakamega Forest near the Uganda border.

**OTHER ATTRACTIONS**

Kenya's Swahili Coast is a fabulous place to chill out after a safari, whether you opt for the classic Indian Ocean beach resorts flanking Mombasa, the cultural delights of labyrinthine Lamu town, or the magical coral reefs offshore of Watamu.

**LOGISTICAL FACTORS**

Kenya's main wildlife destinations are concentrated in the south, so distances are less daunting than might be expected for a country of its size. All the same, you'll need to include a couple of flights (probably via Nairobi) on any itinerary that incorporates the western circuit (Maasai Mara, Lake Nakuru/Bogoria and Laikipia, Samburu-Buffero Springs or Meru) with eastern counterparts such as Tsavo and Amboseli.

*There's more to Kenya than game drives. Ride a horse across a Mara conservancy or take a camel trek through Laikipia; float in a balloon over the savannah or walk with the Maasai; drive a quad bike along a dry riverbed or raft down frothing rapids. Or just wallow in an infinity pool overlooking the plains.*



**TAMARA BRITTEN,**  
KARIBU KENYA



## RWANDA

# GORILLAS... AND THEN SOME!

Rwanda is often sold as a one-trick gorilla-tracking destination and tagged onto to a longer safari elsewhere in Africa, but its trio of complementary national parks more than justify extended exploration.

### MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS

The top attraction is Volcanoes National Park, where you can track mountain gorillas and golden monkeys on the forested slopes of the Virungas, or hike to landmarks such as Dian Fossey's Grave or Bisoke Crater Lake.

### MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE

As with Uganda, it would be obtuse to nominate anything

other than mountain gorilla tracking!

### SECRET WILDLIFE-WATCHING GEMS

Rwanda's two other national parks are wildly underrated and deserve greater recognition. Nyungwe is a magnificent 1,000sq km tract of montane rainforest inhabited by a dozen primate species including a habituated community of chimpanzees. Akagera, by contrast, protects a lush mosaic

of savannah and wetlands where you might see elephant, buffalo, giraffe, hippo and recently reintroduced lion and black rhino. Both parks support a superb avifauna and they complement each other perfectly as birding destinations.

### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

The Kigali Genocide Memorial commemorates the tragic events of 1994. The largest of several beautiful lakes, Kivu is hemmed in by the Rift Valley along the Congolese border.

### LOGISTICAL FACTORS

For short hop visitors, the gorilla tracking trailhead at Volcanoes National Park is only a couple of hours drive north of Kigali airport. For those exploring further afield, this is a small country with good surfaced roads, so you can drive between any two parks in a day.

*The emergence of Akagera and Nyungwe Forest – national parks with genuine character – has made Rwanda a serious safari destination. Game view in Akagera, get on the water in Lake Kivu, walk among the birds and primates of Nyungwe and eyeball the gorillas in Virunga. Also, spend some time in Kigali – it's a remarkable modern African capital.*



**BEN MORISON,**  
FAR AND WILD TRAVEL



### WILDERNESS FACTOR

Outside of the parks, Rwanda is very densely populated, and little natural vegetation survives, but Nyungwe and Akagera remain pristine and carry low tourist volumes.

### Family ties:

The popular Pablo group of mountain gorillas once numbered 65 members





## WEST AFRICA

# NOT A WILDLIFE DESTINATION? THINK AGAIN

It's not immediately top of mind for wildlife-lovers, but there's plenty of interest – and a growing conservation push

West Africa is famed for its rich cultural mosaic, which encompasses curvaceous adobe mosques, mysterious ancient megaliths, colourful traditional markets, a pulsating music scene and much else besides. And its tropical Atlantic coastline is a magnet for sun-starved European tourists during the northern winter. But when it comes to wildlife, West Africa undoubtedly plays second fiddle to eastern and southern Africa. All the same, it does offer some rewarding opportunities to see indigenous wildlife.

Is there such a thing as a West African variant on the classic East African-style safari? Well, that would be Benin's Pendjari

National Park, the flagship component in a 35,000sq km transfrontier reserve (and UNESCO World Heritage Site) that also includes Niger's W National Park and Burkina Faso's Arly National Park. Pendjari protects around 1,700 forest elephants and 400 lions (shockingly, a figure that represents 90 per cent of the remaining West African lion subpopulation), along with significant numbers of leopard, cheetah, buffalo, waterbuck, western hartebeest, korrigum (the west African variant of topi/tsessebe), roan antelope, western kob, olive baboon and patas and tantalus monkey.

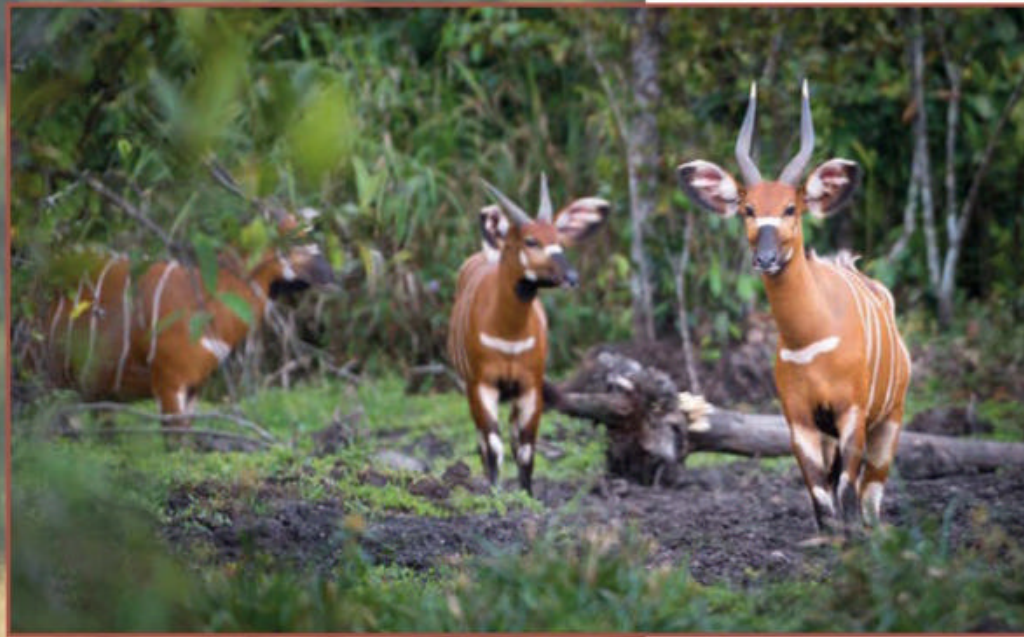
When it comes to primate diversity, west-central Africa clearly outshines other parts of the continent. Most of the

world's remaining gorillas and chimpanzees inhabit the region's forests, which are also home to a giddy variety of monkeys. For dedicated primate viewing, the most alluring option is Gabon's Réserve de la Lopé, which is home to large numbers of lowland gorilla and chimpanzee, as well as being the main stronghold of the mandrill, a large and striking monkey notable for its garish red-and-blue nose and yellow sphinxlike beard.

Even if wildlife is not your primary reason to visit West Africa, you should be able to incorporate a few animal-oriented excursions into your itinerary. For English-speakers, Ghana, with its rich heritage spanning the cosmopolitan south coast, the central kingdom of Kumasi, and the







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**Above:** The western or lowland bongo is found in Congo's dense forests. It is the third largest antelope species

**Left:** African Parks has been involved in West Africa since 2017, when the Benin government invited it to help manage Pendjari, home to around 1,700 forest elephants



MARCUS WESTBERG / AFRICAN PARKS

drier Sahelian north, is a popular general travel choice. It is home to the budget-friendly Mole National Park, which offers guided walks in search of elephant, baboon, warthog and various antelope. Elsewhere in Ghana, Boabeng-Fiema is a community reserve overrun with sacred mona and black-and-white colobus monkeys, while Kakum National Park is famed for its rainforest wildlife and thrilling canopy walkway.

For birdwatchers, West Africa hosts a large number of species absent from the rest of the continent, a list that includes the colorful likes of blue-bellied roller, yellow-casqued hornbill, violet turaco, yellow-crowned gonolek and western bluebill. Birdwatching is rewarding throughout

the region, but where English-speakers are concerned, the market is cornered by The Gambia, a well-organised small country whose proximity to Europe and affordability make it ideal for Africa travel novices. The Gambia offers truly superb birdwatching, with almost 600 species recorded in an area half the size of Wales, and a strong culture of avitourism means there's no shortage of knowledgeable local birding guides.

There are other wildlife highlights too: forest monkeys and antelope in the super-accessible Abuko Wildlife Reserve, a rehabilitated community of chimpanzees on the forested islands of the River Gambia National Park, and the sacred crocodiles protected in Kachikally Pond.

Odzala-Kokoua and Dzanga-Sangha in the Congo Basin offer arguably the most exciting and uniquely different wildlife experience on the continent. Here you explore bays, rivers, forests and savannahs to see gorillas, chimps, pangolins, bongos, forest elephants and buffaloes and a multitude of birds, butterflies and more.

Odzala is a vast wilderness (similar in size to Belgium). The Ndzehi Forest is home to more than 50 gorilla families, tracked from a gentle walk through the forest. A tranquil kayaking excursion down the Lékoli River leads you to Lango Bai – the perfect vantage point to view monkeys, forest elephants and flocks of green pigeons.

For travellers headed to Dzanga-Sangha, an epic journey awaits along the mighty Sangha River, which passes through three countries to reach Sangha Lodge. Dzanga Bai frequently provides a magnificent display of more than a hundred forest elephants, which congregate for their daily dose of clays and minerals.

In these times of travel complexity, the relative ease of exploring this region is appealing to an array of travellers seeking true immersion and escape over at least seven days and in complete safety with a trusted partner.

**ELZA GILLMAN,**  
CONGO CONSERVATION  
COMPANY







ETHIOPIA

**Rare treat:**

The endangered Ethiopian wolf is found only in the Ethiopian highlands. More than half of their total estimated population of just 440 individuals can be seen in Bale Mountains National Park

## UNIQUE WILDLIFE, HITTING THE HEIGHTS

Best known for the ancient architecture along its northern historic circuit, Ethiopia is an underrated and unique wildlife destination whose long list of endemics includes Ethiopian wolf, Walia ibex, gelada monkey and a couple of dozen bird species.

### MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS

The Simien Mountains are the last refuge of the Walia ibex (Africa's only indigenous goat) and the best place to see the spectacular golden-maned gelada. The more southerly Bale Mountains form the most important stronghold for Ethiopian wolf, mountain nyala and Bale monkey; they're also superb for endemic and other birds.

### MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE

There are two, and I'm not prepared to choose between them: the joyous sight of an

endangered Ethiopian wolf trotting nonchalantly through the Afromontane heather of Bale, and the immersive experience of moving with a troop of geladas through the grassy northern highlands.

### SECRET WILDLIFE- WATCHING GEMS

One of my favourite spots in Ethiopia, Guassa Plateau is protected in a 110sq km community conservation area where Ethiopian wolves, geladas and 14 avian endemics roam free. Even more remote, Chebera-Churchura offers superb forest birding and monkey viewing,

and I've encountered elephant, buffalo, hippo and giant forest hog on guided walks.

### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Whew! There's the mediaeval rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, the ancient stelae at Axum, the renaissance-era castles of Gondar, and the secluded island monasteries of Lake Tana. Other highlights include the Blue Nile Falls, volcanic Erta Ale and its bubbling lava lake, and the bird-rich lakes that run through the Rift Valley.

### LOGISTICAL FACTORS

Ethiopia is a large and relatively challenging destination. You can reach most places by road, but domestic flights are more comfortable and efficient. Be realistic about what you can achieve in one visit: the northern historic circuit, including the Simiens, would make for a good two-week trip, while Bale slots in better with the southern Rift Valley. You ideally need a month to explore both in a relaxed way.

### WILDERNESS FACTOR

Ethiopia is by no means a touristy destination, but it is densely populated, so there's not much in the way of genuine wilderness and people seem to pop up in the most remote of places. That said, the country's fascinating and varied local cultures are such an integral part of travel here that few visitors would want it any other way.





UGANDA

#### WILDERNESS FACTOR

Uganda is quite densely populated and it doesn't possess the vast tracts of open savannah associated with some other safari destinations. Equally, the combination of low tourist numbers and lush equatorial vegetation give most parks a genuine wilderness character.

#### Fits the bill:

Uganda's 1000-plus bird species will impress even non-birders, but the Shoebill is the most celebrated

## SMALL, BUT PACKS A BIG PUNCH

Uganda is Africa's most experientially diverse safari destination. Famed for its mountain gorillas, the country also possesses some superb savannah reserves, offers excellent chimpanzee tracking and boasts a checklist of 1,000-plus birds.

#### MOST NOTABLE WILDLIFE DESTINATIONS

Almost everyone heads to Bwindi or Mgahinga to track gorillas. Elsewhere, Kibale is the pick of Uganda's chimp-tracking destinations, while plains wildlife (including the endemic Uganda kob) is conspicuous in Queen Elizabeth and Murchison Falls, both of which offer boat trips on tropical waterways alive with hippos and aquatic birds.

#### MOST ICONIC WILDLIFE EXPERIENCE

Coming face to face with mountain gorillas is quite simply one of the world's most

poignant and memorable wildlife encounters.

#### SECRET WILDLIFE-WATCHING GEMS

The country's most remote savannah destination, Kidepo is a wild and scenic park where you're likely to see lion, elephant, buffalo, Rothschild's giraffe and a variety of antelope. Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary is home to a free-roaming population of introduced white rhinos that can be tracked on foot. A low-key community project at Mabamba Swamp offers dugout canoe trips in search of the charismatic shoebill and other waterbirds.

#### OTHER ATTRACTIONS

A popular activity with adrenaline junkies is whitewater rafting on the Nile, close to its source near Jinja. Further downriver, Murchison Falls is a roaring plume of foaming water where the Nile funnels through a narrow cleft in the Rift Valley escarpment. The volcanic Virunga peaks can be ascended on day hikes into Mgahinga, but you need to embark on a challenging multi-day hike to explore the glacial peaks of the Rwenzori Mountains.

#### LOGISTICAL FACTORS

Uganda's western tourist circuit is relatively compact and well suited to experienced 4x4 self-drivers, though most visitors either arrange a guided tour or fly between parks. Depending on how much time you have, the shortest variation focuses on Bwindi and Queen Elizabeth, but it could be extended south to Mgahinga, north to Kibale, further north to Murchison Falls, or northeast to Kidepo.

*Not only does Bwindi Impenetrable Forest hold over 450 mountain gorillas, it's also great for hiking and biking. I recommend hiring a mountain bike from the Ride 4 a Woman charity and cycling the forest trails, spotting wildlife. If visiting for more than 10 days, start at Murchison Falls; it's a unique and diverse park, my favourite place in the world.*



**AMOS WEKESA,**  
GREAT LAKES SAFARIS





JOHN NEWBY / SAHARA CONSERVATION FUND (2)

CHAD

# THE NEXT FRONTIER

Seldom do we look too far north for our safari kick, but there's some intriguing work going on to protect the Sahel's wildlife that's worth checking out.

BY **JOHN NEWBY**

When was the last time you heard Chad mentioned as a wildlife tourism destination? Rarely, I bet, yet this Sahelian nation in the very centre of the continent, only six hours away from Europe, is definitely worth a visit. With its extensive network of national parks and reserves, protected areas cover all parts of this highly biodiverse country, from the Sahara desert in the north to the wooded savannahs of the south.

Zakouma National Park is becoming increasingly well known as a tourism hotspot, with its incredible diversity of birds and mammals. And desert aficionados will undoubtedly have heard of the staggering and virtually untouched beauty of the Tibesti and Ennedi mountains, with their immense, rugged, and wind-sculpted landscapes and unique rock art.

The next frontier, however, is the Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Game Reserve. This immense sub-desert grassland in the heart of Chad occupies an area equivalent to twice that of Belgium or Switzerland. For over a decade, the Sahara Conservation Fund (SCF) has been at the forefront of action to preserve this vast area's unique and

exquisitely adapted aridland fauna and flora. SCF's goal is to save the reserve's existing wildlife, while restoring species that have been lost during more turbulent times.

Starting in 2016, scimitar-horned oryx bred in captivity were released into the reserve. This magnificent white and rusty-coloured antelope had become extinct in the wild during the latter part of the 20th century. Today, over 400 roam free in the reserve. Buoyed by the success of this ground-breaking operation, the critically endangered spiral-horned addax, has also been reintroduced to prevent its extinction in the wild. Another antelope on the brink of extinction – the majestic dama gazelle – is also being protected, with plans underway to boost numbers through captive-breeding and reintroduction.

The Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Game Reserve is the only place on the planet where one can see scimitar-horned oryx, addax, dama and dorcas gazelles, North African ostrich, endangered bustards and vultures, and a host of other smaller desert species. Interest from wildlife-loving tourists and a small number of savvy tourism operators is increasing.



**Living free:** Spiral-horned addax (top) and scimitar-horned oryx (inset) in Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Game Reserve

Unlike many of Africa's national parks that are no-go areas for local people, game reserves like Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim were established to allow pastoralists to continue using the space and sharing its natural resources with wildlife.

Tourism can play an important role in creating incentives to conserve nature, but the benefits must reach the pockets and livelihoods of local people if conservation and much needed development goals are to be met. To remain in harmony with social, economic and environmental realities, low impact tourism based heavily on community involvement could ensure benefits flow to the right people in a way that is compatible with the area's stark beauty and its highly conservation-dependent array of rare and endangered species.

**JOHN NEWBY** IS CO-FOUNDER OF THE SAHARA CONSERVATION FUND (SAHARA CONSERVATION.ORG), FORMER CEO, AND ITS SENIOR CONSERVATION ADVISER.



*If you're looking for something different, Zakouma is for you. While the elephants are Zakouma's poster boys (and girls), the park is much more than that: it has phenomenal birdlife, incredible landscapes and, above all, nomadic people. At 3000sq km, a sixth of the size of the Kruger, its habitat is varied and, in parts, reminiscent of Kafue and Luangwa in Zambia and Mana Pools in Zimbabwe. Large pans, around which wildlife and birdlife congregate in the dry season, dot the area and lonely inselbergs rise on the horizon.*

**JUSTIN WATERIDGE**, STEPPES TRAVEL





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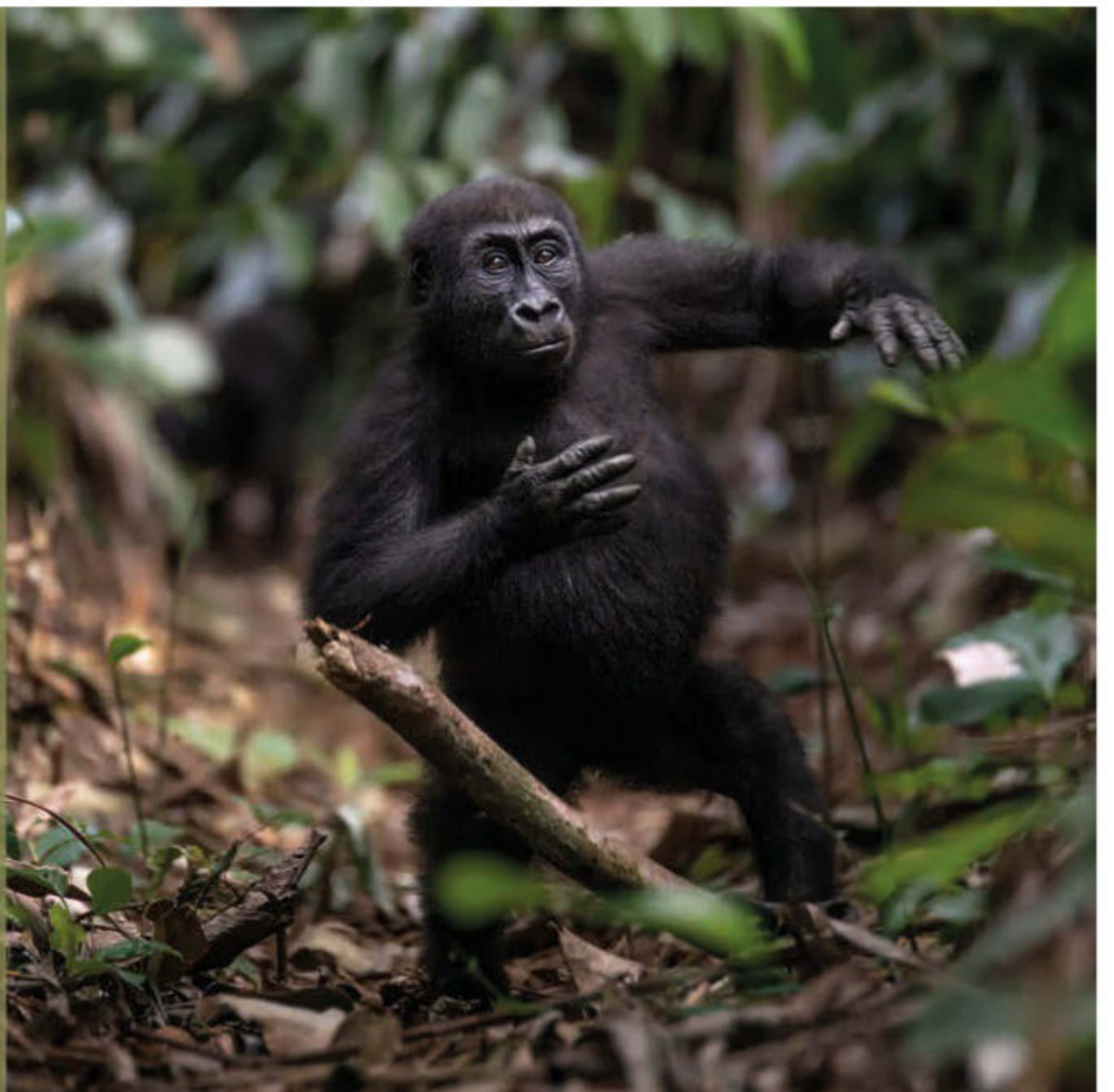
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**LISTINGS**

# IDEAS BANK: GREAT WILDLIFE PARKS

With the plethora of national parks and game reserves available across Africa for wildlife-watching, you're spoiled for choice. Each has its own characteristics, and every one of us has different interests and experiences, so it's impossible to say if one is better than another. We may have our favourites, but perhaps there are some we haven't been to that might blow us away? Whether you're plotting your first trip or your twentieth, it's always fun to explore the options.

So, we thought we'd assemble a few lists of parks you might want to consider including in your next itinerary. These are not a 'best of', but rather suggestions that might be worth checking out. How many have you been to? In an attempt to narrow the focus we have ended up sticking mostly to East and southern Africa, with odd exceptions that may be relatively easily accessed off a fairly traditional safari path.

WORDS BY **LIZZIE WILLIAMS**

## YOU CAN'T GO WRONG

**Africa's most famous parks are popular for good reason. If your priority is to see as much as possible in the time you have available, you can't go wrong with these. They are easily accessible whether you are on an organised trip or self-drive and have a good range of tourist facilities. It's no surprise they are favoured by first-time safari-goers because they seldom disappoint, and are also frequently visited by experienced travellers who appreciate their size, range of habitats and diversity of wildlife.**

● **Greater Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya / Serengeti National Park, Tanzania**

Spanning the Kenya-Tanzania border, the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem is most famous for the wildebeest migration that sees great herds follow the rains in search of fresh grazing, with the predators in their wake. Don't be too obsessed with the migration, though: the parks are superb year-round, regardless of where the great herds are.

● **Ngorongoro Conservation Area, Tanzania**

The largest intact volcanic caldera in the world, Ngorongoro contains some of the most fertile and richest grazing grounds in Africa and a huge concentration of wildlife including all iconic big species.

● **Greater Kruger, South Africa**

Roughly the same size as Israel, Kruger National Park and the adjacent private reserves offer a wealth of habitats and

landscapes and all the animals visitors would expect to see on safari.

● **Northern Botswana (Chobe National Park through to the Okavango Delta and Moremi)**

This region of rivers, wetlands, seasonal islands, forests and grassy plains sustain a constant parade of wildlife and are particularly well known for herds of elephants and abundant birdlife.

● **South Luangwa National Park, Zambia**

Large herds of game descend the dusty banks of the Luangwa River to drink, while it's also renowned for high concentrations of leopard and is a great destination for walking safaris.

● **Etosha National Park, Namibia**

Dominated by a massive white sun-baked salt pan, wildlife-watching here is easy and rewarding thanks to numerous waterholes and good

roads, while large mammals like elephant and rhino are plentiful.

● **Amboseli National Park, Kenya**

With its backdrop of Kilimanjaro, this varied landscape of grassy plains, lush swamps and seasonal lake are chock-a-block with animals from cheetahs to hippos and 420 bird species. Particularly good for elephant-watching.

● **Volcanoes National Park, Rwanda; Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda**

It is often said that staring into the eyes of mountain gorillas is one of the most magical and memorable wildlife experiences in all of Africa. Volcanoes and Mgahinga straddle the soaring Virunga Mountains, and while slightly fractured, nearby Bwindi has the most habituated groups.

**Thirsty work:**

In the dry season, Etosha's waterholes attract a multitude of species, meaning wildlife lovers are seldom disappointed





## YOU WILL ALSO LOVE

These might not be as well-known as the big hitters opposite – and therefore not necessarily first on your list – but they certainly deliver. Regular safari-goers rate these very highly, as they offer excellent wildlife and are generally less touristy, but are still easily accessed and offer a range of decent facilities and activities.

- **Mana Pools National Park, Zimbabwe / Lower Zambezi National Park, Zambia**

The Zambezi Valley is known for abundant wildlife and these two facing parks are superb for walking and canoeing safaris, allowing up-close encounters with big game.

- **Laikipia, Kenya**

Northwest of Mount Kenya, this vast patchwork of privately-run conservancies and ranches is one of the largest wildlife conservation areas in Kenya and a stronghold for rhino and wild dogs.

- **Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, South Africa**

In central KwaZulu-Natal, Africa's oldest game reserve (est. 1895), is a conservation success story for white rhino, and is also home to cheetah, zebra, giraffe, hyena and many more iconic species in the hilly, forested terrain.

- **Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe**

Often combined with visits to Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe's premier park features grasslands, mopane woodlands, dams and waterholes and is especially known for large concentrations of elephants, lions, buffaloes and wild dogs.

- **Ruaha National Park, Tanzania**

Hot, dry and wild, Tanzania's best kept wildlife secret has just a handful of camps

and dramatic scenery including the Great Ruaha River, scattered hills and rolling grasslands dotted with baobab trees.

- **Nyerere National Park, Tanzania**

Formerly Selous Game Reserve, at 30,000sq km Africa's largest park has its lodges and greatest concentration of wildlife in the north, around the Rufiji River, where boat safaris are a highlight.

- **Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda**

The country's largest savannah park. A highlight is a boat cruise on the Kazinga Channel between lakes George and Edward to see Nile crocodiles, huge pods of hippos and an astonishing 600 species of birds.

- **Kafue National Park, Zambia**

Zambia's largest and oldest park protects a wide variety of habitats and a rich diversity of wildlife. With few lodges or visitors, Kafue is unspoiled by tourism.

- **Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, South Africa and Botswana**

Characterised by dunes and dry riverbeds, with wildlife including black-maned lion, cheetah and an especially large array of raptors. The South African side has well-developed tourist camps, while the Botswana bush camps are remote and wild.



- **Addo Elephant National Park, South Africa**

With woodland, grassland and an incorporated marine reserve, Addo is the third largest national park in the country, with over 600 elephant as well as lion, buffalo, black rhino, leopard and excellent birding.

- **Makgadikgadi Pan, Botswana**

One of the world's largest salt flats covering 12,000sq km, this is a surreal unearthly place to spot antelope like gemsbok, eland and red hartebeest, while after rains flamingos turn the pan fringes pink and migrating zebra and wildebeest arrive.

- **Madikwe Game Reserve, South Africa**

A lesser-known bushveld reserve stretching north to the Botswana border and home to the Big Five and wild dog. Accommodation is restricted to the private safari lodges.

- **Tsavo East and West National Parks, Kenya**

While the road/railway connecting Nairobi and Mombasa cuts clear through the centre of Tsavo, combined these make up 40 per cent of Kenya's protected land: East is drier and flatter



and features the Galana River and large herds of elephants, while West has volcanic landscapes, bubbling springs and a black rhino sanctuary.

- **Samburu National Reserve, Kenya**

In arid and hot northern Kenya, the life-giving Ewaso Ng'iro River attracts large mammals like elephant and buffalo and northern species including gerenuk, Grevy's zebra, Beisa oryx and reticulated giraffe.

- **Liwonde and Majete National Parks, Malawi**

In recent years African Parks has restocked these two parks with lion, elephant, cheetah, black rhino and others, and they are now very worthwhile safari destinations. →

**Top:** Addo Elephant Park is a strong option for wildlife-loving visitors to South Africa's Eastern Cape

**Above:** Queen Elizabeth NP in Uganda is a good place to see tree-climbing lions, in the Ishasha sector



## FEELING ADVENTUROUS?

If you like to get further off the beaten track, you're in luck. Some of Africa's most rewarding parks are among the least visited, which is a shame as they need the protection offered by tourism. You have to make a bit more of an effort to get there, but you will seldom be disappointed. Most have a presence of the big iconic species, but you come to appreciate the full range of wildlife you may not pay attention to elsewhere – as well as the solitude. And remote doesn't mean you have to rough it: although fewer than at other parks, most have good accommodation options.

### ● Zakouma National Park, Chad

Another successful restoration by African Parks after decades of neglect, Zakouma is now a safe haven for wildlife including massive elephant and buffalo herds and rare herbivores like roan antelope, Lelwel's hartebeest and Kordofan giraffe.

### ● Kidepo Valley National Park, Uganda

In the very far northeast, the vast savannah landscape supports many carnivorous species like hyena, cheetah and wild dog, while the park's only accommodation, Apoka Safari Lodge, is delightfully isolated in the wilderness.

### ● Gonarezhou National Park, Zimbabwe

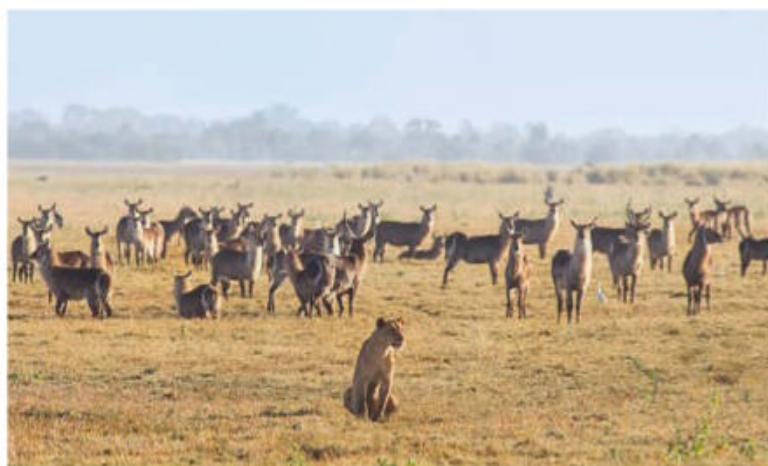
This 5000sq km rugged wilderness in the south-eastern lowveld has a good variety of wildlife and spectacular scenery including the Runde River, overlooked by the red sandstone Chilojo cliffs.

### ● Katavi National Park, Tanzania

With few camps and visitors, habitats here range from floodplains and waterways teeming with hippos and crocodiles to woodlands and open grasslands where lions prey on herds of buffalo.

### ● Liuwa Plain National Park, Zambia

A wild and remote park in the far west, featuring shallow floodplains and golden grasslands that



MICHAEL DOS SANTOS / GORONGOSA NATIONAL PARK

attract herbivores like blue wildebeest, zebra and red lechwe in their thousands followed by predators like cheetah and spotted hyena.

### ● Bangweulu Wetlands, Zambia

This wetland is a life source for antelope like sitatunga, black lechwe, tsessebe and oribi, and hundreds of bird species including the southernmost occurrence of the Shoebill.

● **Tuli Block, Botswana**  
Along the Limpopo River on the southeastern border with Zimbabwe and South Africa, Tuli comprises several private reserves. Wildlife is abundant; it is especially good for spotting elephant and leopard.

### ● Gorongosa National Park, Mozambique

The country's flagship wildlife park, where the floodplains and forests are home to especially large herds of waterbuck, as well as many other antelope species, elephant, hippo and

crocodile. (Closed from December to March.)

### ● Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Botswana

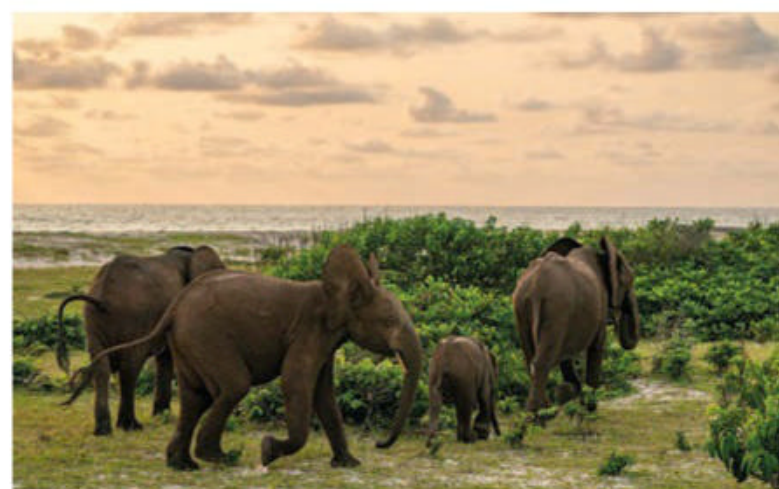
Dirt tracks wind through this sprawling desert terrain that is home to a surprising number of animals, including a large number of Kalahari black-maned lions.

### ● Damaraland, Namibia

Ideal for self-drive, this barren and stark but ruggedly beautiful mountainous region is home to desert-adapted and free-roaming elephant, rhino and lion, while Twyfelfontein features exceptional Bushmen rock paintings.

### ● Congo Basin

Spanning six countries in central-west Africa, this mosaic of rivers, savannahs, swamps and dense forests harbours primates, forest elephants and over 1000 bird species: western lowland gorillas can be tracked at both Odzala-Kokoua National Park and Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve.



### ● Loango National Park, Gabon

13 national parks cover 10 per cent of Gabon, but it's coastal Loango's remarkable biodiversity that has the X-factor; highlights are mangrove forests, tidal lagoons, beachcomber forest elephants, surfing hippos, western lowland gorillas, and nesting leatherback turtles.

### ● Bale Mountains and Simien Mountains National Parks, Ethiopia

Focus on these two to spot Ethiopian endemics such as walia ibex, gelada baboon, Ethiopian wolf, mountain nyala and numerous birds. Both have high plateaus, precipitous escarpments and Afromontane habitats exceeding 4000m.

**Top:** Black lechwe in Bangweulu Wetlands  
**Left:** Large herds of waterbuck (and others) can be seen in Gorongosa

**Above:** Forest elephants approach the beach in Loango NP





## HIDDEN GEMS

**In most countries there are a few lesser known – usually small – parks that are well worth lingering in. They often get omitted from mainstream itineraries because time doesn't allow, but fit them in alongside one or two of the bigger parks and you might find they steal the show and capture your heart.**

### ● **Matobo Hills National Park, Zimbabwe**

This small 440sq km park is a tumbling landscape of spectacular granite hills, bushmen paintings and forested valleys with healthy populations of both black and white rhino and black eagle.

### ● **Kasanka National Park, Zambia**

On the south-western edge of the Bangweulu Wetlands basin, this tiny park of miombo woodlands, floodplains and riverine bushveld is best known for its annual

migration of millions of African straw-coloured fruit bats (Oct-Dec).

### ● **Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve, Malawi**

Managed by African Parks, in 2016/17 this 1800sq km reserve was restocked with 500 elephants and 2000 other animals in an ambitious and historical translocation exercise.

### ● **Akagera National Park, Rwanda**

With habitats including savannah, montane forests, lakes and wetlands, African Parks

has reintroduced locally extinct species including black rhino and lion. It's now the only park in Rwanda where you can see the 'Big Five'.

### ● **Karoo, South Africa**

Before farming became dominant, this semi-arid scrubland straddling much of north-central South Africa used to have springbok, giraffe, cheetah, rhino, Cape lion (and now-extinct quagga). Today many private reserves have reintroduced these species back: notable rehabilitation initiatives can be found at Samara and Sanbona.

### ● **Mahale Mountains National Park, Tanzania**

With steep, lush forests and white sand beaches on Lake Tanganyika,

Mahale is known for its primates, including yellow baboon, red colobus, blue, red-tailed and vervet monkeys and more than 1000 chimpanzees, of which a habituated group can be visited on foot.

### ● **Mkuze Game Reserve / iSimangaliso Wetland Park / Phinda Private Game Reserve, South Africa**

These three adjacent conservation areas in northern KwaZulu-Natal cover typical savannah safari country with a diverse variety of big game, as well as coastal beaches and Lake St Lucia – a superb birding destination.

### ● **Arusha National Park, Tanzania**

Dominated by 4566m-high Mount Meru, this also features savannah grasslands, ancient fig forests and a network of lakes. It is great for walking or canoeing safaris to see plains game, monkeys and birds. Include a few days at the beginning of a northern circuit safari.

### ● **Saadani National Park, Tanzania**

North of Dar es Salaam, East Africa's only park with an Indian Ocean frontage that offers a unique combination of both marine and mainland flora and fauna, from elephants to green turtles. 

### **Low profile:**

Mahale, on the southern shores of Lake Tanganyika is a great spot for tracking chimpanzees, from Greystoke Mahale lodge

NOMAD TANZANIA



### **Looking for more?**

*More info on some of these and other wildlife parks and reserves across Africa can be found at [SafariBookings.com](https://www.safaribookings.com), which offers an impressive range of reviews written by seasoned safari travel writers, including author Lizzie Williams.*



# GETTING INTO THE HABITAT

Wildlife favours particular ecosystems, be it because they provide more suitable food or make it easier for the animals to protect themselves from predation. This influences what we can see and how easy the viewing can be. Some parks are dominated by one habitat, where others boast several, allowing for a more varied experience – if you are willing to spend longer or travel more to enjoy it. One such park is Kafue, in Zambia.

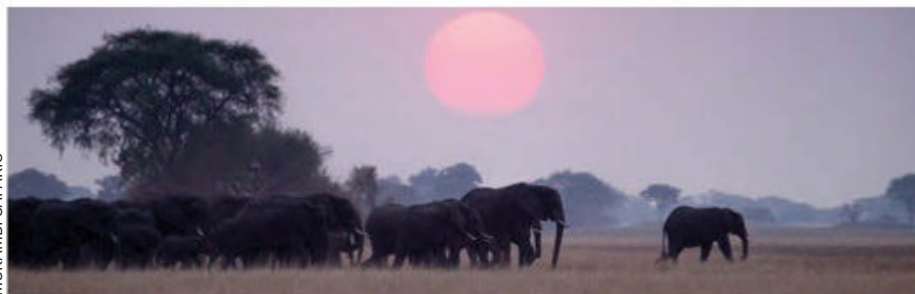
BY **PHILIP BRIGGS**

Kafue National Park is a big place. If you're planning a safari there, dauntingly so. Zambia's oldest national park, named after the river that forms its lifeblood, it sprawls across the west of the country for a full 22,500sq km, making it larger, for instance, than the Kruger, or the Serengeti and Maasai Mara combined.

Wildlife viewing in Kafue can be outstanding. Home to a gobsmacking 152 mammal species, this is one of the few safari destinations where you might realistically see – and I've personally encountered – the full suite of Africa's five most impressive carnivores: lion, leopard, cheetah, spotted hyena and painted dog.

Few if any parks compare to Kafue when it comes to ungulate diversity. A checklist of 20 antelope species includes eland, greater kudu, roan and sable, the diminutive blue and yellow-backed duiker, the swamp-loving red lechwe and sitatunga, and the most southerly population of the distinctive Defassa waterbuck. I'd also regard Kafue to be one of southern Africa's most rewarding but unsung birdwatching destinations, especially when it comes to localised aquatic species, miombo specialists and raptors.

Despite this, Kafue is a bit of a mixed bag, ecologically and experientially. Much of the national park comprises vast swathes of tsetse-infested miombo woodland that offers rich birding but supports low densities of large mammals. Elsewhere, however, this monotonous landscape is interspersed with Serengeti-like vistas of grassland teeming with zebras and antelope, navigable rivers fringed by lush riparian forest, perennial marshes alive with birds, and the vast Lake Itzhi-Tezhi and its associated floodplain. In short, Kafue is a prime example of the sort of safari destination where your experience will hinge greatly on which of its many different sectors you decide to visit.



MUKAMBI SAFARIS

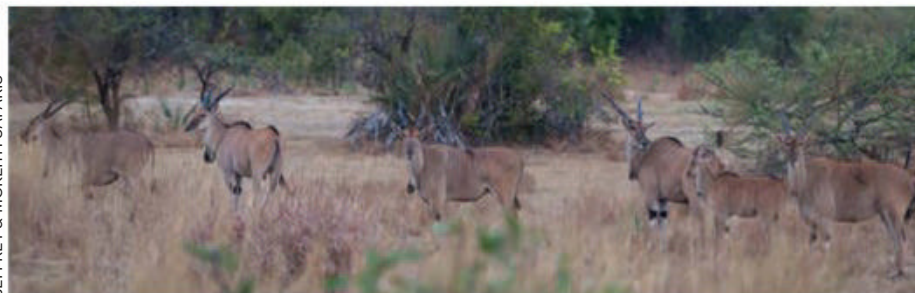
## BUSANGA FLOODPLAIN

A contender for Zambia's most dazzling wildlife showpiece, the 800sq km Busanga Floodplain is formed by the Lufupa River as it meanders through the black cotton soil of northwest Kafue. An inaccessible quagmire during the rainy season, Busanga comes into its own over May to November, when the floodwater retreats to reveal a mesmerising expanse of yellow grass punctuated by permanent marshes and island-like stands of figs, sausage trees and palms.

Busanga's allure is enhanced by its remoteness and exclusivity: there's only a handful of small camps, and it's difficult for self-drivers to access, so tourist traffic is very low.

Busanga stands alongside the Serengeti when it comes to carnivore sightings. Prides of 20-plus lion are lorded over by the imposing black-maned males that once earned Kafue legendary status in trophy hunting circles. It isn't great leopard territory, but we've had fantastic sightings of cheetah and wild dog, and the localised side-striped jackal is very common.

Other Busanga specialties include oribi, roan antelope, wildebeest, zebra and immense herds of red lechwe, a handsome and sociable marsh-dwelling antelope with elongated, splayed hooves that allow it to move easily through shallow water. Birding is exceptional too: conspicuous highlights include saddle-billed stork and large flocks of grey crowned crane, wattled crane and black egret, while dedicated twitchers should look out the likes of Hartlaub's babbler, rosy-throated longclaw and Fulleborn's longclaw.



JEFFREY & MCKEITH SAFARIS

## CENTRAL KAFUE

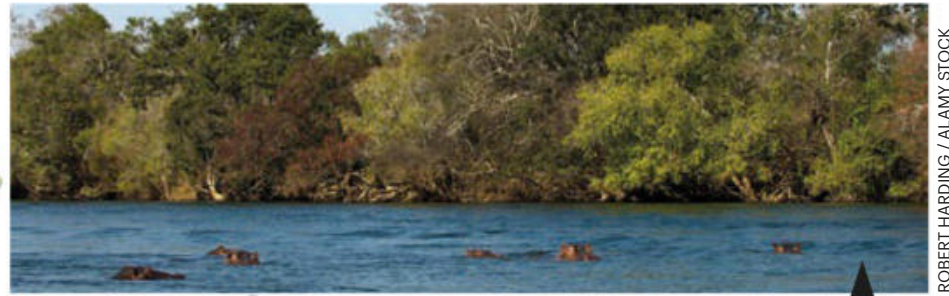
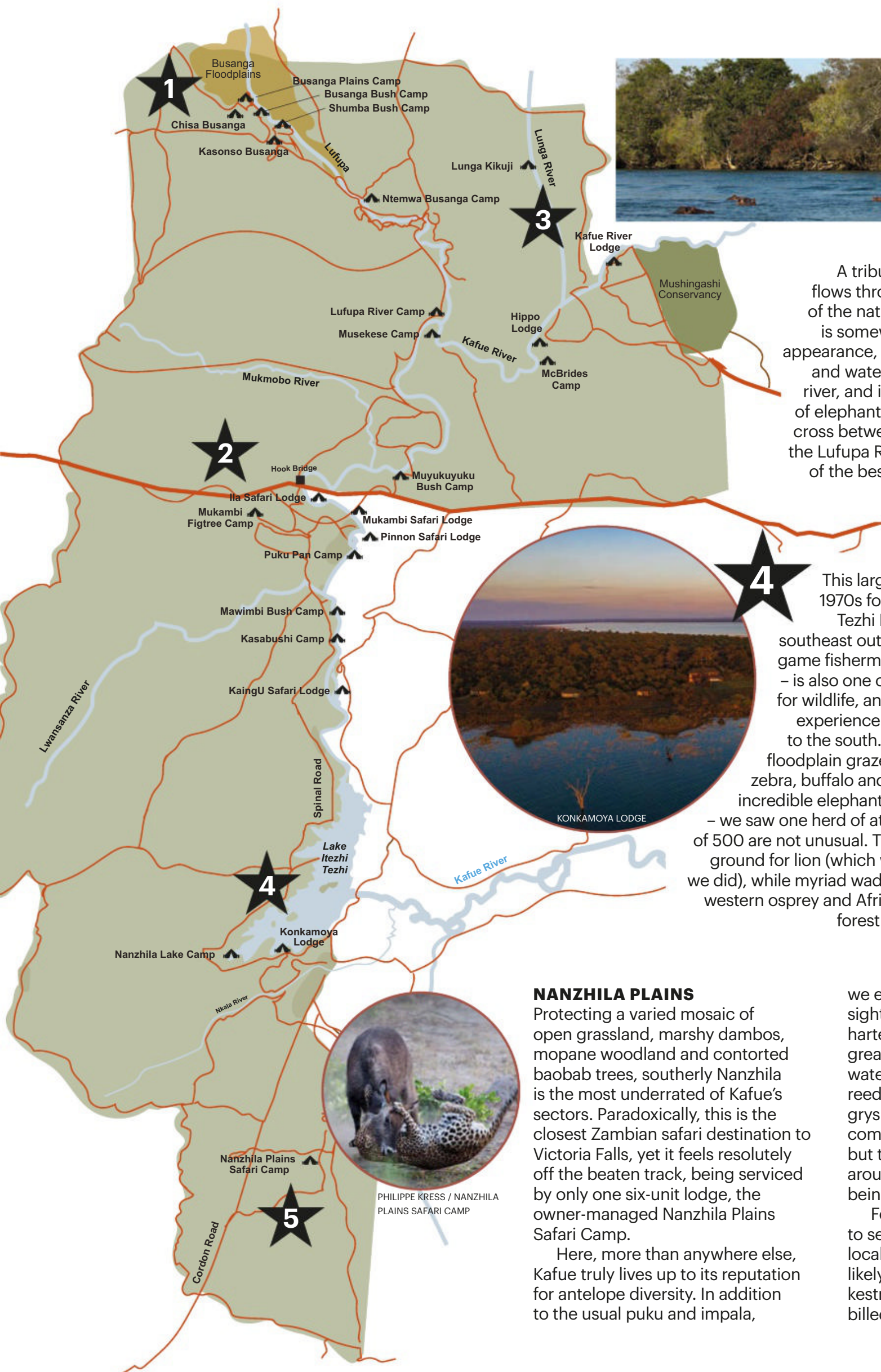
Bisected by the surfaced M9 from Lusaka, central Kafue is the most accessible part of the national park, and it houses the largest concentration of lodges, camps and campsites. Most of these lie along the Kafue River, where boat trips reliably offer close-up

encounters with hippo, elephant and a wide variety of waterbirds. Even more rewarding is the Lufupa, a northerly tributary of the Kafue fringed by shady riparian forest.

There's no better place anywhere for ticking the elusive African finfoot, and other avian highlights include Schalow's turaco, trumpeter hornbill and black-backed barbet. Away from the river, we found game viewing in the dense miombo woodland of central Kafue to be hit and miss, but you should see lion, and cheetah and leopard are quite often encountered too.







ROBERT HARDING / ALAMY STOCK

### LUNGA RIVER

A tributary of the Kafue that flows through the far northeast of the national park, the jungle-lined Lunga is somewhat reminiscent of the Lufupa in appearance, but even wilder. Hippo, crocodile and water monitor are abundant along the river, and it's not unusual to interrupt a herd of elephants splashing and cavorting as they cross between the banks. Birdlife is similar to the Lufupa River, with the bonus of being one of the best places in Zambia to look for the spectacular Ross's turaco.

### LAKE ITEZHI-TEZHI

This large artificial lake was created in the 1970s following the construction of Itzhi-Tezhi Dam on the Kafue River as it flows southeast out of the national park. Popular with game fishermen, Lake ITT – as it's known locally – is also one of the park's most rewarding areas for wildlife, and it offers a great complementary experience to Nanzhila, only two hours' drive to the south. Flanking the lake is a wide grassy floodplain grazed by large herds of puku, impala, zebra, buffalo and other ungulates. You can expect incredible elephant concentrations in the dry season – we saw one herd of at least 150 individuals, and groups of 500 are not unusual. The floodplain is a popular hunting ground for lion (which we didn't see) and leopard (which we did), while myriad waders pick along the lake shore, and western osprey and African fish eagle perch on the ghost forest that protrudes from the shallows.

### NANZHILA PLAINS

Protecting a varied mosaic of open grassland, marshy dambos, mopane woodland and contorted baobab trees, southerly Nanzhila is the most underrated of Kafue's sectors. Paradoxically, this is the closest Zambian safari destination to Victoria Falls, yet it feels resolutely off the beaten track, being serviced by only one six-unit lodge, the owner-managed Nanzhila Plains Safari Camp.

Here, more than anywhere else, Kafue truly lives up to its reputation for antelope diversity. In addition to the usual puku and impala,

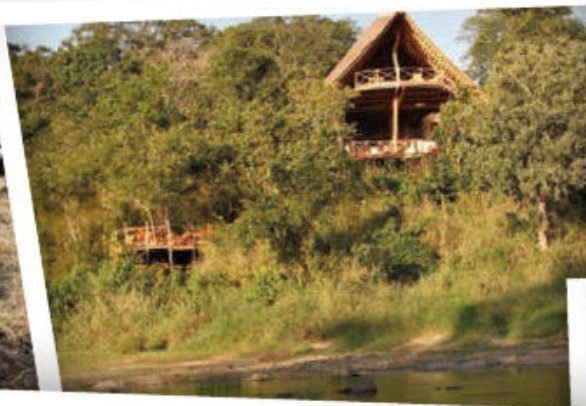
we enjoyed excellent sightings of Liechtenstein's hartebeest, sable antelope, greater kudu, Defassa waterbuck, southern reedbuck, bushbuck, Sharpe's grysbok and oribi. Elephants are less common than in other parts of Kafue, but there are plenty of carnivores around – the highlight of our visit being a pair of mating lions.

For birders, Nanzhila is the place to see the black-cheeked lovebird, a localised Zambian endemic. Other likely highlights include Dickinson's kestrel, coppery-tailed coucal, broad-billed roller and Arnot's chat.

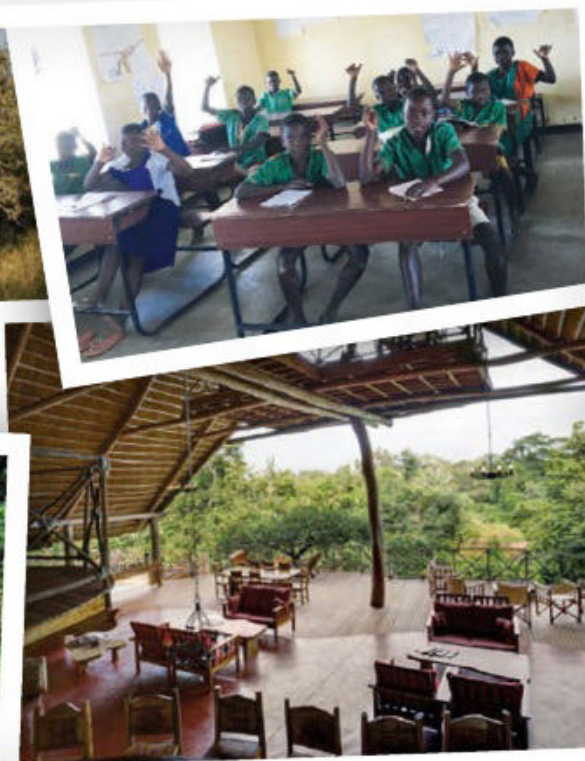




WILL WHITFORD



WILL WHITFORD



TONGOLE WILDERNESS RETREAT (4)

## DEEP IMPACT

Some parks resonate because of something deeper than the safari experience itself. Often these are smaller parks that are being revived or are particularly important to local communities, and where visitors know their stay has far-reaching benefits.

BY SUE WATT

There's something very soothing about returning to a special place whose stories draw you back time and time again. For me, that is Nkhotakota.

In 2012, a new lodge, Tongole Wilderness Retreat, first lured me to Malawi's oldest and largest wildlife reserve, long before conservation organisation African Parks took on its restoration. Few visitors ventured here and wildlife was sparse, decimated by poaching.

Despite this, Tongole was built beside the Bua River in memory of local teenager Vitu Kalanga, who had died tragically in a car accident in England. His father Bentry and British philanthropist David Cole set out to create a lasting legacy for him with Vitu's community at its heart. Born of love and hope, the soul of Tongole

emanates from the reason for its existence.

Over 100 local people were employed during Tongole's construction; many still work there today. The Tongole Foundation built a new primary school, Chilimani (now the best in the district) and renovated other schools, providing solar power, desks, teaching materials and computers. It runs wildlife clubs too and funds underprivileged pupils into secondary school.

"The Tongole Foundation started small," Emmanuel Kandiero (*inset, below*) told me recently. "I've seen it grow from helping a few families to helping thousands of people through education, sanitation and livelihoods, and now working hand in hand with African Parks, achieving what we all thought might be impossible."

When I first met Emmanuel in 2012 he was an armed scout accompanying our hike up Mount Kasukusuku, which offers spectacular views across this hilly reserve. By my next visit in 2016, he was head guide. Today, he's Tongole's general manager.

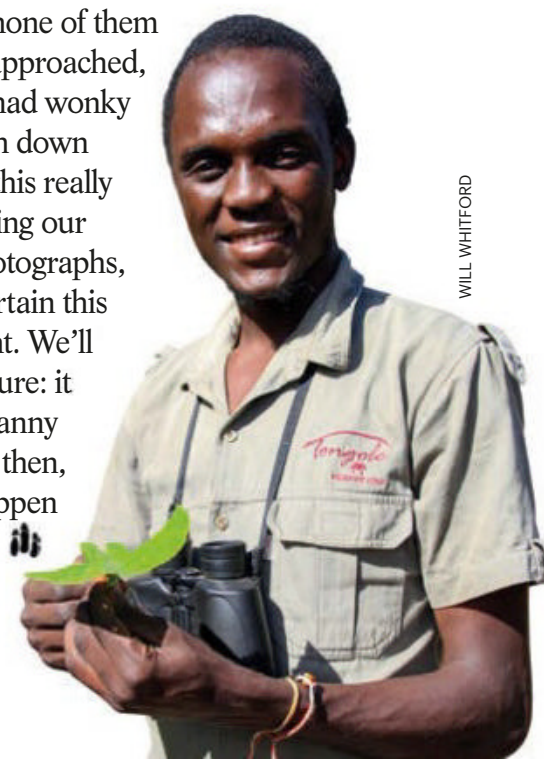
"Tongole has changed my heart," Emmanuel said. His new role is his "dream come true," and he still guides guests, whether hiking, fishing, canoeing or on game drives. "When I first came, we struggled with poachers," he added. "But no gunshots are heard now. African Parks built an electric fence around the reserve, employed more scouts, brought in more animals, and we've seen amazing improvements."

Those animals also draw me back. Along with zebra, warthogs and myriad

antelopes, African Parks ambitiously translocated 500 elephants from Liwonde in 2016 and Majete in 2017. On that first day on Liwonde's floodplains, I monitored a darted elephant with wonky tusks. With my hand cupping her trunk, I nervously counted her every breath for 20 minutes, determined she would come to no harm. Overnight, her herd was transported to Nkhotakota and the following day, with huge relief, we watched all nine elephants sauntering from their boma, ready to explore their new home.

Two years later, I returned to Tongole to find 'my' elephant again. It should have been straightforward since most translocated matriarchs had collars. But my herd's matriarch had died: with no collar, we had no means of tracking them. Instead, we drove for hours, searching. In vast wooded terrain, our chances seemed slim.

Suddenly, near Wozi Gate, we found eight elephants, none of them collared. As we approached, we realised one had wonky tusks. Shivers ran down my spine: could this really be her? Comparing our translocation photographs, we felt almost certain this was 'my' elephant. We'll never know for sure: it would be an uncanny coincidence. But then, special things happen at Nkhotakota...



WILL WHITFORD





# A gentle touch



We're proud that **Tongole Wilderness Retreat** makes a significant difference to people in Nkhosakota, Malawi. Through the pandemic we continued to support our staff. Wildlife in the area is thriving and our guest reviews are consistently positive. We focus, as always, on the five A's of tourism – Accessibility, Accommodation, Attractions, Activities and Amenities – to ensure our guests have an exceptional, off-the-beaten-track wildlife experience on the Bua River. **Join us in celebrating our 10th anniversary – with a Pay Three Nights stay Four Nights offer at Tongole Wilderness Retreat, valid through to the end of December 2022.**

Learn more at [www.tongole.com](http://www.tongole.com)  
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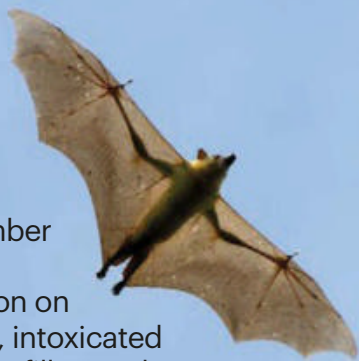




## WHERE? WILDLIFE EVENTS

### STRAW-COLOURED FRUIT BATS

● **Where?** Kasanka National Park, Zambia  
● **When?** October-December  
● **What?** Welcome to the biggest mammal migration on Earth. From mid-October, intoxicated by the seed-rich fruits that fill Kasanka's trees, enormous colonies of fruit bats descend on a small swamp forest in northeast Zambia. Soon, some 10 million flying foxes – who wing their way from the Congo Basin, a trip of about 2000km – have invaded a space no larger than a hectare, ready to eat their way through 5000 tonnes of fruit each night.



MAURITIUS IMAGES / MALCOLM SCHUYL / FLIPA / IMAGEBROKER

## A SERIES OF FORTUNATE EVENTS

So, you've ticked off your species top ten, but what about being at a wildlife 'happening'? This is real bucket list territory – aspirational, dramatic, once-in-a-lifetime experiences, impressive because of their sheer scale or, just as legitimately, an incredible intimacy. Here's our pick of the animal equivalents of Woodstock...



MAURITIUS IMAGES / RADIUS IMAGES

### ZEBRA

● **Where?** Chobe and Okavango to Makgadikgadi Pan, Botswana ● **When?** End of November to March  
● **What?** Some 30,000 zebra create a dazzling scene as they travel 250-400km from Chobe and the Okavango to Makgadikgadi, and anywhere from 500-800km on the way back. As the rains fall on the pan, the zebra begin to move, heading south to seek fresh grasslands – a journey of about two to three weeks. The routes taken, notably on the return to Chobe, are not always direct, hence the variation in distance covered and time taken – up to 80 days – to make it home.





### WILDEBEEST

- **Where?** Maasai Mara, Kenya/ Serengeti, Tanzania
- **When?** Year-round
- **What?** This is the big one! Seasonal rains drive 1.5 million wildebeest – along with a supporting cast of Thomson's gazelle (500,000) and zebra (200,000), and a few other hangers-on – clockwise around this spectacular ecosystem in a constant search for new pastures. Throw in river crossings, croc feeding frenzies, big cats stalking the herds, swathes of grazers spreading out over the plains and a mass calving season, and you have a series of episodes to pick from. Choose your time and place and settle down for the show.
- **Alternative option:** OK, this is small-time when compared to the Mara/Serengeti version, but it's still the second-largest wildebeest migration in the world – and the number of tourists watching it are considerably fewer. As the November rains fall, 45,000 wildebeest arrive on the Liuwa Plain in Zambia, having travelled up to 150km from the north and Angola.
- **Sidenote:** Check out the excellent work of the Frankfurt Zoological Society in protecting the Serengeti at [bit.ly/ta-fzs](http://bit.ly/ta-fzs)

DANIEL ROSENGREN / FRANKFURT ZOOLOGICAL SOCIETY



### MOUNTAIN GORILLAS

- **Where?** Rwanda, DR Congo, Uganda
- **When?** June to December is considered the best time for gorilla trekking
- **What?** As African wildlife drawcards go, this is right up there. Just over 1000 mountain gorillas remain in the wild, although this is somewhat of a resurgence compared to a few years ago. Take a guided trek up the mountain slopes and into equatorial forest to spend a spiritual-like hour with one of our closest relatives. From the dominant silverback to maternal females and the boundless energy of the youngsters, this is as good as it gets.



STEVE TURNER / ORIGIN SAFARIS

### WHITE-EARED KOB AND TIANG

- **Where?** The Sudd, South Sudan/Gambella NP, Ethiopia
- **When?** Year-round
- **What?** From December to May, around 800,000 white-eared kob and a few hundred thousand tiang antelope and Mongalla gazelle head east from the floodplains of the Sudd through Boma National Park towards the western swamps of Gambella National Park in Ethiopia. They are constantly on the move – a slow 1500km journey driven by a never-ending quest for fresh grass – travelling in columns that can stretch up to 80km in length by 50km wide. June through November sees the migration go into reverse. 🏕️





### VULTURINE GUINEAFOWL

The largest of Africa's unique guineafowls is also perhaps the most elaborately 'dressed', with peculiar chestnut down on nape and black and white hackles on neck and chest. Best searched for in the arid thornveld areas of Kenya (like Tsavo East), Tanzania and Ethiopia.



### AFRICAN FINFOOT

The African finfoot favours quiet forested tropical rivers with vegetated margins and overhanging branches – their habitat adding to their search appeal. These shy birds with bright red bills and oversized feet are exceptional swimmers, with markedly stiffened tail feathers. The Zambezi River above the Victoria Falls and around Kutima Mulilo, Lufupa River (Kafue National Park), Luvuvhu River (Greater Kruger), and Loango (Gabon) are all good places to search for it.



### BATELEUR

The striking Bateleur eagle is still fairly common (although Endangered) in all the larger treed savannah conservation areas of sub-Saharan Africa. Their very short tails and long primaries give them a distinctive bat-like appearance and make them agile fliers. Their common name is derived from the French word *bateleur*, meaning acrobat.



### CAPE SUGARBIRD

The males of these specialised nectar-feeding birds have long, elaborate tails and are typically seen darting around flowering proteas, their preferred food source. Look out for them in Kirstenbosch and Harold Porter Botanical Gardens on your next visit to South Africa's Western Cape.

## ASPIRATIONAL BIRD SIGHTINGS

Africa's bird diversity is immense, with the continent home to about 2,445 species (depending on taxonomy) and a high rate of endemism. Wonderful birding experiences await wherever you go, but here are a few that are particularly worth seeking out.

BY MARTIN BENADIE

### PEL'S FISHING-OWL

A highly sought-after sighting, the Pel's fishing-owl is a reclusive nocturnal piscivore with dark penetrating eyes. A highlight is to hear that deep 'oom' call at night, clearly recognisable to those with a keen ear. An estimated 100 pairs are found in Botswana's Okavango Delta owing to the clear waters that this species needs. Liwonde (Malawi) is another favoured haunt.



### WATTLED CRANE

A stately species which frequents large wetlands on riparian floodplains. Strongholds include the Okavango Delta (Botswana), Busanga Plains (Kafue, Zambia), Nyika Plateau (Malawi) and Sanetti Plateau (Ethiopia). Seeing large congregating and vocalising flocks of these birds is a definite spectacle. 🦏

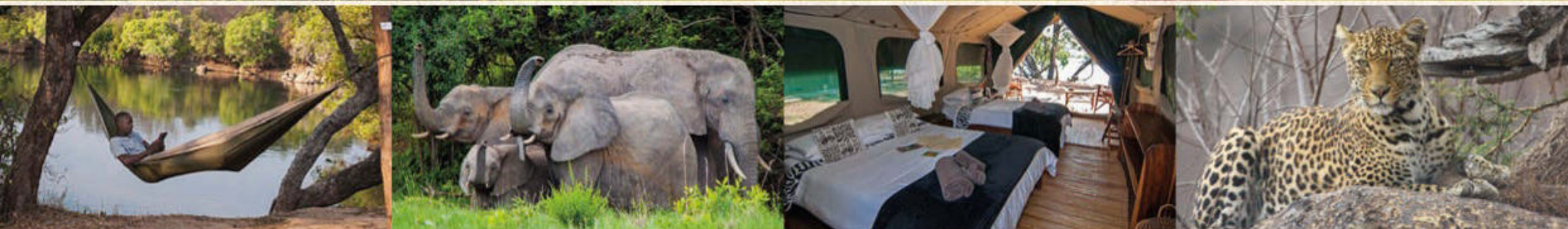


### SHOEBILL

One of Africa's most iconic birds, highly prized by twitchers, the bizarre Shoebill is patchily distributed around papyrus swamps from Sudan to Zambia. Uganda (Murchison and Mabamba) and Zambia (Bangweulu) are probably the easiest countries in which to see it. They use their monstrous bills for bill-clapping displays and to catch lungfish, and even Nile monitor lizards or young crocodiles. So revered, these birds featured in the artwork of the ancient Egyptians. If you manage to see one, be careful of their mesmerising death stare.







# Kafue – escape to Mayukuyuku

Are you thinking of a safari in Zambia? Mayukuyuku Bush Camp in the Kafue National Park is an ideal choice for serious wildlife enthusiasts and birders looking to find probably the widest variety of species in Africa. If you prefer a small, intimate, rustic bush camp with quality comforts and excellent freshly-prepared food, Mayukuyuku should be on your list. We have just four en-suite tents overlooking the Kafue River.

If you are passionate about wildlife or wildlife photography, you will be spoilt for choice here. Kafue is home to four of the 'Big Five', plus cheetah, wild dog, 15 different antelope species, more than 450 recorded birds and there's an abundance of trees, butterflies and insects in a variety of different landscapes – many not found in any other Zambian parks. Our little bush camp can tick many of these boxes.

The great advantage of the Kafue is its considerable size and the Kafue River. The park is massive and the Kafue River can be enjoyed all year round as it never dries up. You are unlikely to see another vehicle on game drives, nor another boat when on the river, game viewing or fishing – this means you can enjoy your own little piece of paradise. You can take your time to feel the true ambience of the wild thickets and woodlands, open plains and rocky outcrops.

From here you can venture into other areas of the park. It is well worth concentrating a whole holiday here, split over maybe two weeks. Kafue Camps & Safaris can assist with building a package to include the Busanga Plains in the north or Lake Itzhi Tezhi and Nanzhila Plains to the south.

Note that Mayukuyuku stays open all year, is located inside the park opposite a beautiful island. We do NOT charge our single travellers a single supplement. We also have an excellent six-night stay on offer.

Book direct or use your favourite Tour Operator to assist you.

Contact us on [info@kafuecamps.com](mailto:info@kafuecamps.com) for reservations and further information

See [www.kafuecamps.com](http://www.kafuecamps.com) for general information and photos

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 Camp, on the banks of the Kafue River





# SAFARI MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

Whether it's a Pel's fishing-owl or a pangolin, you're not alone. It seems everyone has a bucket-list species that escapes them, even after years of determined searching.

BY **STEVE AND ANN TOON**

Unkered down in the dim, cosy sleeping chamber, our eyes adjust to the semi-darkness and we just about make out three bodies. Two lie prone; low rhythmic noises emanating

from their direction suggest they're sound asleep and oblivious to, or totally disinterested in our arrival. The third, a much smaller individual, is more than a little curious – shuffling and snuffling about excitedly, disturbing its bedding in order to investigate us with its funny, bunny ears and long, permanently twitching snout.

It's not every day you get invited to meet the latest member of an aardvark family, especially here at home in their burrow...

We should come clean. This isn't one of those feverish dreams prompted by the latest travel restrictions, nor our pitch for a movie (although *Honey I Shrank the Safari-goers* might just be enough to tempt us back into a cinema). It's our one and only claim to laying eyes on an aardvark in the flesh, a species that's eluded us for more than twenty years. Albeit in a British zoo.

We were visiting to photograph pioneering research into the walking patterns of southern white rhinos (another story), and by a stroke of luck the keeper accompanying us just happened to look after the aardvarks as well. When she heard how desperate we were to eyeball one she took pity and gave us a quick peek

before the zoo opened. It's special to be granted a backstage pass to the enclosure of any nocturnal resident in captivity, but it's just not the same as stumbling across an aardvark in Africa, in the wild.

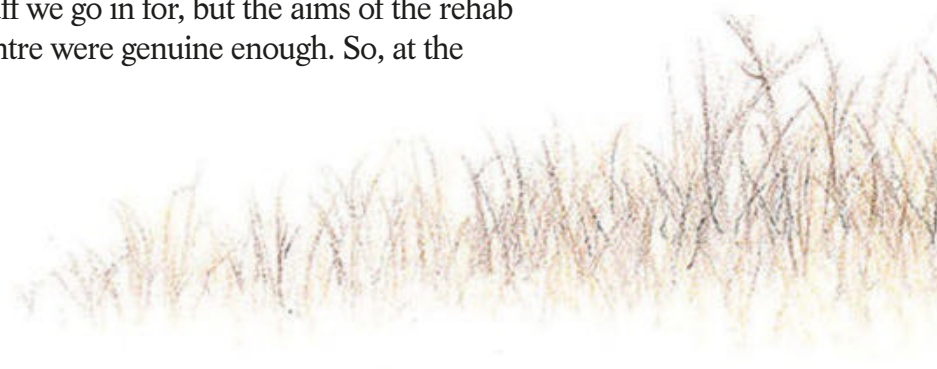
That was several years ago. Today – despite our best efforts – we're still chasing our own tails to catch sight of the curious animal that heads the wildlife alphabet by a nose. Big five, little five, they're all well and good, but we're talking about the 'special one' here.

It's not simply the aardvark's reputation for being one of the most difficult animals to see on safari that inspires our continued quest, but the fact that as wildlife photographers we totally identify with this quirky creature's solitary lifestyle and clever ability to stay hidden when it needs to (well, certainly where we're concerned!). And as journalists we can't help but celebrate a species that perpetually zig-zags and stops frequently to sniff briefly at things.

It's not like we haven't put in the hard yards searching for an aardvark in the wild, and yes, we have been looking in all the right places. Months in the Kalahari, weeks in the Karoo, freezing our socks off on cold winter night drives in all the recommended hotspot habitats and reserves. All to no avail. Fellow travellers and wildlife enthusiasts sharing their images of sightings on social media, which we should perhaps only see as encouragement – as in 'if they can spot them then so can we' – only serve to make things worse. If I want to ruin Steve's day all I need to do is call him over to my screen when I find another cool aardvark pic waiting to be liked or given a 'wow'.

We were so hungry for a sighting we even tried again just for a glimpse of one in captivity at a rehab centre for rescued wildlife in Botswana. We'd heard it could be coaxed out with corn at a particular time each afternoon. Not usually the sort of stuff we go in for, but the aims of the rehab centre were genuine enough. So, at the

WE KNOW FULL  
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COME LACED WITH  
NO SMALL SENSE  
OF SADNESS  
AS WELL





earliest opportunity we found ourselves with a handful of other folk, mainly small children, calling 'Ethel' at the tops of our voices. Needless to say Ethel's super-sensitive snout got one whiff of the Toons' desperation and stayed put.

To up the ante we made special pilgrimages to destinations we'd carefully researched online and followed up copious leads we'd heard through the grapevine. We visited South Africa's Tankwa Karoo National Park, made night drives on De Beers' Benfontein nature reserve – a centre for research into many nocturnal 'safari specials' such as aardwolf and black-footed cat – and stayed at Samara private game reserve in the Eastern Cape, known to have a healthy population. Wherever we headed, the aardvarks didn't.

We started to believe our presence on any game vehicle setting out to look for aardvarks would only jinx things for the other guests. We interviewed an aardvark researcher on Samara who shared fascinating insights into the

aardvark's behaviour and its role as an eco-engineer, digging out burrows which are subsequently utilised by many other species of mammal, reptile and bird. But no useful insights into how to see one for ourselves.

How pathetic we've become in our hunt; we even became disconcertingly excited when we discovered a fresh aardvark carcass on a recent visit to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. We had no idea how it met its demise, but proof positive that the species really existed in the red dunes of our beloved Kalahari certainly served to give our search a reboot.

If you're tempted to think by now the aardvark has become our albatross, fear not. They say that the tougher the challenge the bigger the reward, and that's the way we figure it. We genuinely relish our game of aardvark hide-and-seek and know full

well that if and when we do finally cross paths with one, the ultimate gratification we experience will come laced with no small sense of sadness as well.

The journey has not been without its serendipitous surprises. Recently we started doing some nocturnal camera trapping. One evening after dark on a private game reserve in Kwa-Zulu Natal we set up our kit outside the lodge for a trial run, to test everything worked okay before taking it into the bush for real. When we scrolled through the results on the camera the next morning – fully expecting empty frames triggered by bats or wind-blown grasses – we were stunned to see it had caught an aardvark secretly taking a drink of water under the stars.

How typical in this long-running cat-and-mouse saga that it wasn't us in the end photographing an aardvark, but an aardvark photographing itself for us. Yes, there it was – porcine but perfect – laying down yet another tempting crumb for us on the everlasting trail. 🦔



ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW BELL





1

### **PORCUPINE**

Porcupines can be found almost anywhere, in nearly all types of terrain. But the savannahs of East and southern Africa are a good place to start your search. During the day, they may cohabit with warthogs in holes in termite mounds; they also like rocky crevices, caves, hollow logs and burrows. After dark, they fossick for food, using regular trails. Ask your guide where these are, and look for tell-tale signs of digging, discarded quills and fresh droppings.

# YOUR ELUSIVE ELEVEN

A wildlife sighting holy grail. We've all got one. We asked which animals have eluded you. Here are a few suggestions to aid your search. Good luck!



2

### **AARDWOLF**

Found in East and southern Africa, the rarely seen aardwolf prefers termite-laden, open country – from arid scrub to moister, high-altitude grasslands. Although largely nocturnal, you can sometimes spot them out and about in overcast weather. During the day, they rest up in abandoned dens of other animals. In winter, they turn diurnal, often feeding in the late afternoon.



3

### **AARDVARK**

Found throughout Africa, the aardvark frequents semi-arid, open habitats. A good bet is to try parks with few predators; with the cooler, dry months yielding the best sightings. You are likely to see one only at night, but note they rarely step out until several hours after dark. By day, they rest in burrows. Flies around an entrance and three-toed tracks nearby are a good sign an aardvark is at home. Also, look for fresh digging around termite mounds.

### **PANGOLIN**

Widespread but scarce, a night drive is your only realistic chance of locating a pangolin (though some are active in the day during winter). They inhabit grasslands, rocky and wooded habitats; some species are arboreal – living in hollow trunks

or hanging out in the branches. Eastern Zambia is a sighting hotspot and they can be seen in the Congo forests, while Tswalu, in the southern Kalahari, has tagged a few individuals with telemetry devices, enabling easier tracking.



4



### **SITATUNGA**

Most of their population hangs out in inaccessible equatorial swamp forests in central Africa. But sightings of this semi-aquatic antelope are possible at the likes of the Okavango Delta, best seen from a mokoro; Saiwa Swamp in Kenya; Bigodi Wetlands in Uganda; or Bangweulu Swamps and Kasanka National Park in Zambia, which provides viewing hides. While you may see them out for a swim, they spend most of their time hiding in the papyrus reeds.

5



### CARACAL

Enjoying dry environments, though not deserts, caracal inhabit the hills, woodlands and savannahs of sub-Saharan Africa. The solitary and nocturnal cat also thrives in farming areas. The smaller Cape reserves of South Africa are a good place to look. Keep an eye out on the road at night, in rock crevices and up trees – the caracal marks its territory by clawing trees. Listen out for its cough-like mating call.

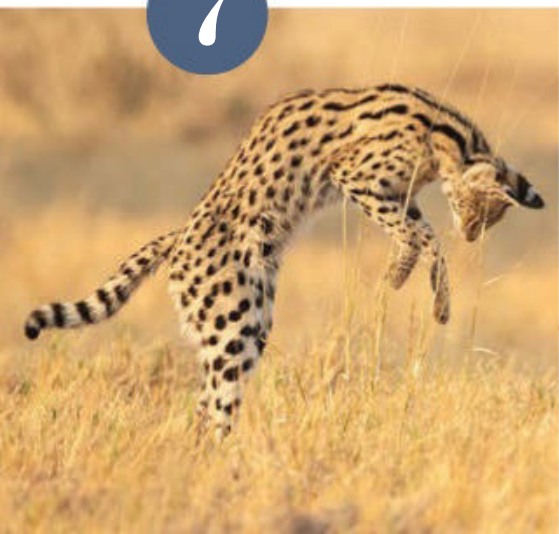
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### SERVAL

Relatively common in East and southern Africa, widespread in Zimbabwe and with small populations in the north, servals like areas with a vast expanse of moist, open grassland that teems with rodents. Mostly seen after dark, they can also be spotted in early mornings or late afternoons, particularly when overcast. Listen out for their high-pitched 'how-how-how' call.

7



8



### HONEY BADGER

Frequenting most of Africa's national parks and most habitats (except desert), the honey badger is another predominately night-time operator. To find one, look for other animals, such as the greater honeyguide, which leads the badger to bee hives and, of course, honey, or the pale chanting goshawk, which follows the foraging badger, ready to swoop on anything it flushes out. Habituated individuals can be seen scavenging around camps.

9



### BROWN HYENA

Endemic to southern Africa, the mainly nocturnal brown hyena avoids areas with high numbers of lion or its spotted cousin. Preferring woodland savannahs, deserts and semi-deserts, they are most often seen in the dry scrublands of the Kalahari. The best sightings come at a known den, at dawn or dusk. A lone scavenger, brown hyenas follow previously used trails to seek carcasses on which to gorge.

10



### CIVET

Found across sub-Saharan Africa, the civet favours the thick cover of woodland and forests, close to water; if in open territory, they will seek tall grasses in which to hide. They are primarily nocturnal, though can be seen during the day, particularly when cloudy. It's also worth checking up trees, and you can sometimes find them scavenging around camps after dark.

11

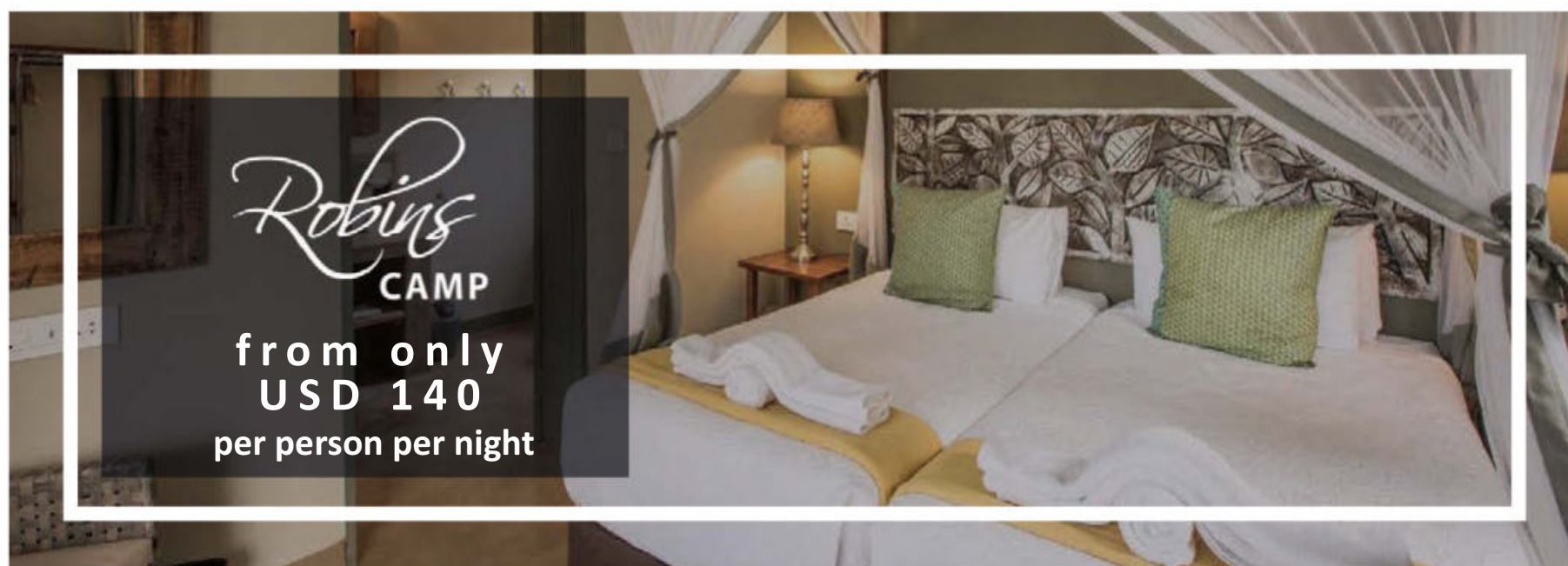
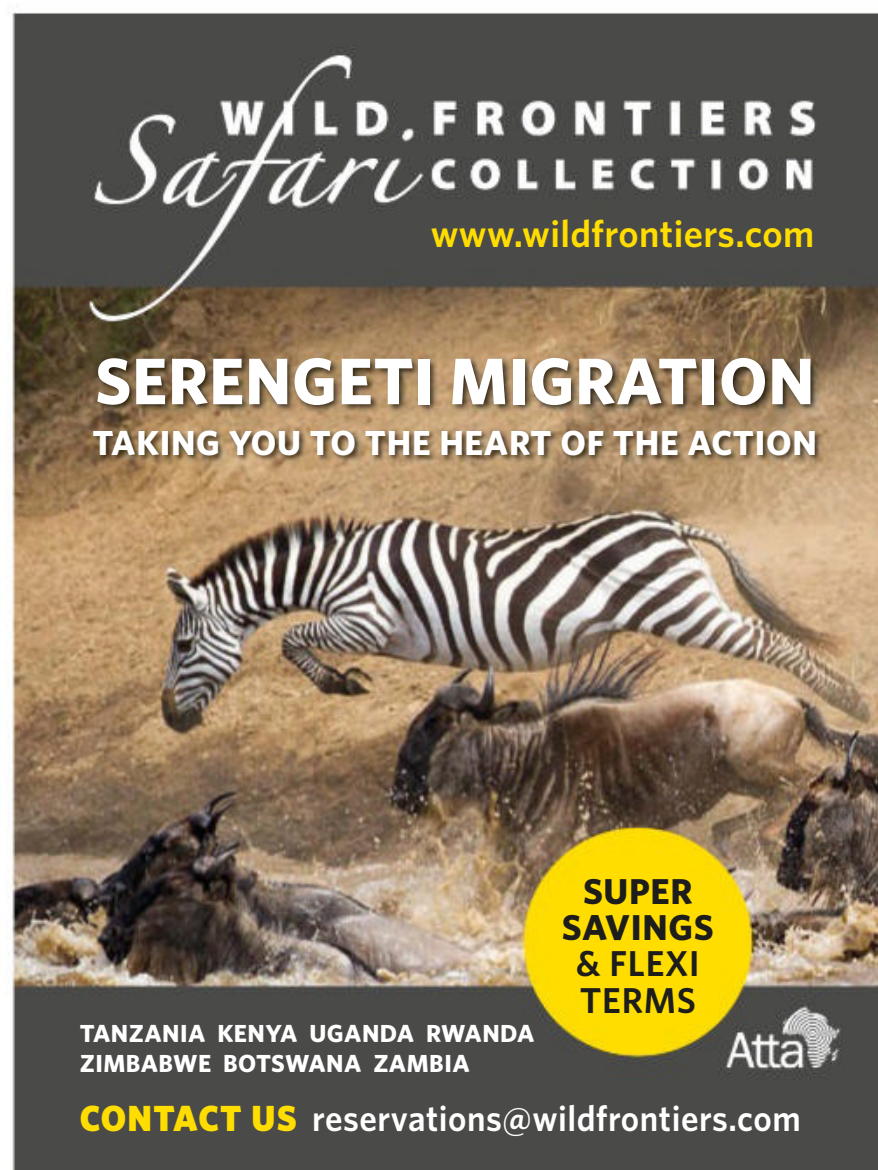
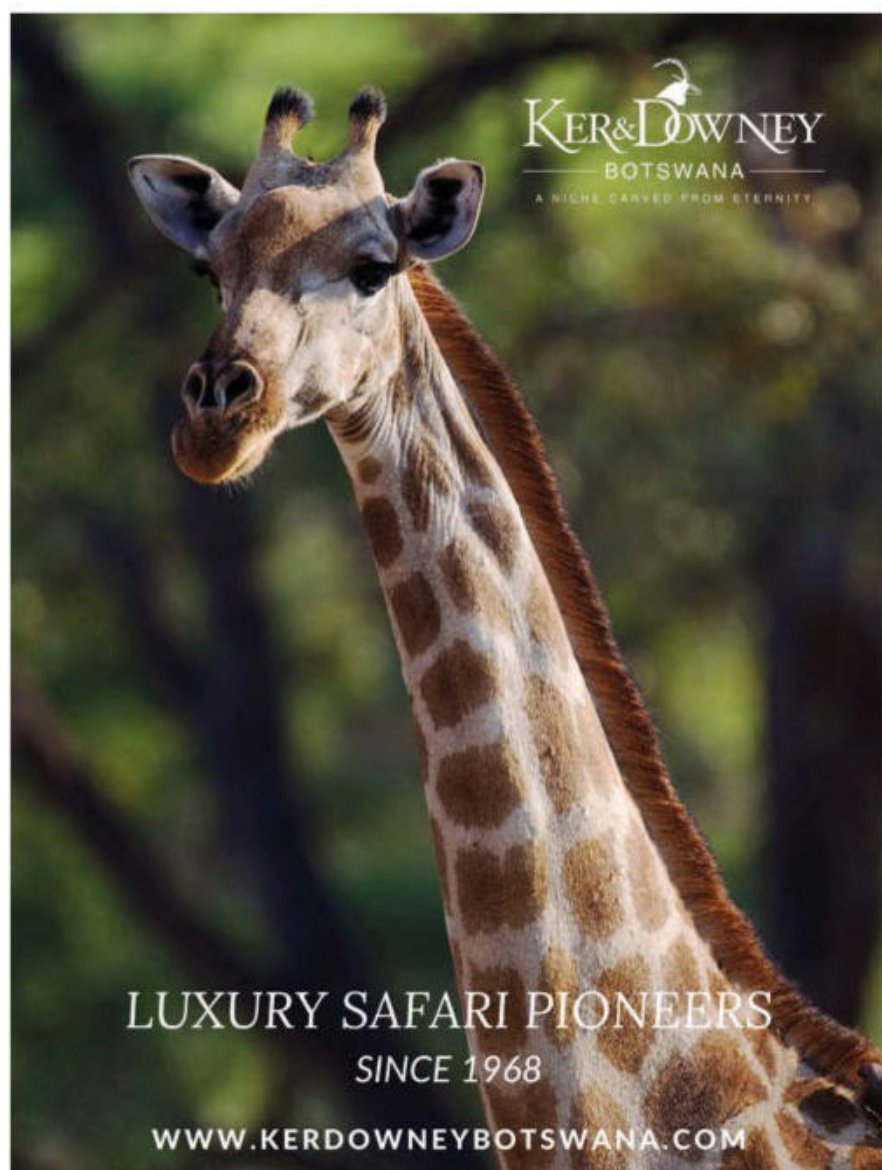
### AFRICAN ROCK PYTHON

Africa's largest snake lives anywhere it can find a supply of small animals, water and thick (particularly riverine) vegetation – be it savannah, woodland, swamp or semi-desert. Pythons are also partial to caves, kopjes and abandoned burrows. They can be active day or night, but lie dormant during the dry season. Although plentiful, they are difficult to see: their camouflage pattern does its job so well you can easily step over one without noticing.



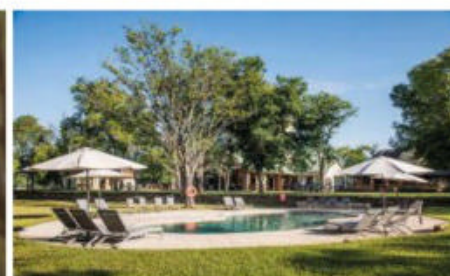
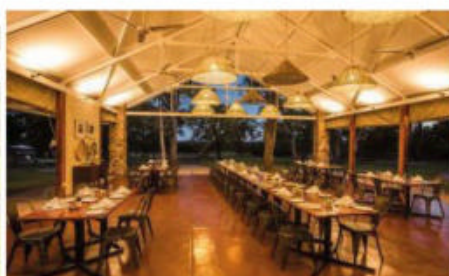
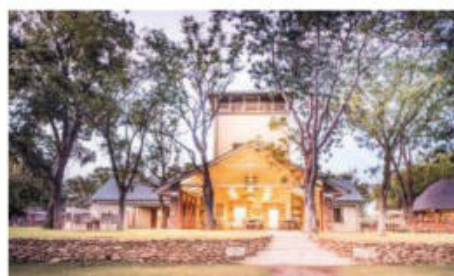
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## CRESTA

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*Let's keep it personal...*

In this magazine you'll read about how a guide can greatly enrich your wildlife-watching experience. My name is Clint Robertson. My wife Kelly and I run private-guided safaris for small groups all around my home country of Zimbabwe. Our trips are raw and authentic; proper mobile safaris with a focus on having the wildlife experience you have dreamed of. It's important we get to know you, to understand your interests, so you can get the most from your trip. So, please get in touch and let's put something together for you...



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THE

# SAFARI

EXPERIENCE

**You've arrived, binoculars at the ready, eager to get started.**

Now you're on the ground, is there something you can do to ensure you have the most rewarding safari possible? Some tricks of the trade, perhaps, to help you find the animals you've come to see? Here's a few ideas that may make the experience all the more enriching. →

**Golden moments:**

Guests at Mara Explorer Camp on giraffe watch in the Greater Maasai Mara



# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

As much as we might like it to be, watching wildlife is not always plain sailing. As guests in their domain, we need to fit in with the animals. To stand a chance of finding them, we need to know where and when to look. Perhaps the hardest thing is the anticipation, the hope, the desire to have the greatest experiences all to yourself. It can be hard work, but it can also be incredibly rewarding. Just expect the unexpected...

BY GRAEME GREEN

A grey heron floated across the waters of Lake Tagalala, standing upright, feet submerged. The ears and eyes of a hippo were just visible above the surface, seemingly content to be doing the hard work for the passenger riding on its back.

Moments like this can make a safari. Alone in our small boat, deep inside Tanzania's Nyerere National Park (formerly Selous Game Reserve), there were no other tourists, just us with hippos, fish eagles, crocodiles, buffalos, baboons and hitch-riding herons for company.

But was this the best wildlife sighting we were going to have today? Earlier, we'd heard that a group of Dutch tourists had seen wild dogs on the other side of the park. We'd driven for hours on rocky roads to where the pack had been spotted, searching until hope faded.

Deciding if our day had been a success (sunset and great wildlife on Lake Tagalala weighed against a missed opportunity to see rare wild dogs) and who had had the better time (the Dutch tourists or us) depended on whether we had a 'glass half full' or 'glass half empty' attitude.

Such comparisons are common on safari, especially during evenings when travellers gather around the campfire to recount their sightings. Envy creeps in, as does the feeling of missing out on something 'unmissable'. A pleasant day spent watching elephants, lions and birds can be tainted by hearing that others got to see a leopard. Such thoughts might be petty, but they're human. Of course, we're happy for someone who wins the lottery, but we can't help wishing that ticket was in our hands instead.

More than this, there's also the crushing weight of our own expectations. Travellers arrive in Africa with dreams of the animals they want to see, but the reality is rarely an exact match. A safari should be a chance to witness

remarkable wildlife, reconnect with nature and recharge our batteries. But it can also feel pressured, especially when safari holidays can be expensive and the number of days we have available are limited.

For those with regular access to wildlife – the people who work in the industry, guides, camp managers or photographers – or those with the resources to take regular safaris, it's easy to think "Never mind, there's always next time." But for those who've saved for years for a once-in-a-lifetime trip, a honeymoon or bucket list adventure, it's harder to be philosophical. If a person has given their all in the hope of seeing a leopard in the wild, spending day after day lucking out can be demoralising.

Fuelled by wildlife documentaries and glossy brochures, it's easy for first-timers to think they'll see it all, that animals will abound, that cheetahs will chase down gazelles before their eyes, cute lion cubs will tumble around and a stream of elephants will parade in front of Kilimanjaro. Anything less than life-and-death moments of drama might be a disappointment.

The reality is, of course, very different. Natural history programmes show only the spectacular highlights – a film crew might have worked for months, with little happening, to get just 90 exhilarating seconds of footage. No matter how abundant the wildlife, the special sightings you have in mind might take hours or days of driving around – or fail to materialise altogether. With wildlife, there are never any guarantees. Patience is required.

This is a world away from the immediate gratification demanded by consumers in our modern economies. In the bush, we can't simply order up the perfect wildlife experience to arrive by Next Day Delivery. Nor can we switch channel or flick to the next web page to find something more satisfactory. Not everyone likes that lack of control, but for me this is the great appeal. Out here, nature urges you to slow down and keep your eyes open for the unexpected. Often the highlight of a trip isn't what I thought it would be – a colourful bird or a remarkable lizard, rather than one of the iconic species I came to photograph. And there have been many underwhelming days. →

**Check mate:**  
Seeing lions mating is top of many wildlife enthusiast's wishlists, but it is a rare treat. This photo, by Heidi Pay, was highly commended in The Greatest Maasai Mara Photographer of the Year competition in 2019. See [www.thegreatestmaasaimara.com](http://www.thegreatestmaasaimara.com) for more







I understand the pressure people can feel to have the greatest possible wildlife encounters every day. That can be exacerbated by the expense and time restrictions that come with the territory. With gorilla trekking permits in Rwanda costing US\$1500 for one hour (US\$600-\$700 in Uganda), every minute with the apes can feel overwhelming. The hour is over so quickly, and there's always the risk you'll meet another group of tourists who got to see grooming adults and play-fighting baby gorillas, eclipsing your own experience.

But whether you've come to see gorillas, cats or birds, disappointment is rare. I almost always come back from a wildlife trip with only positive memories, a wealth of photos and a renewed sense of wonder in the natural world.

As you'll read in the pages of this magazine, there are ways to lower the risk of being disappointed, starting with careful research to choose your safari company and destination. If you want to see a specific species, it makes sense to go to a known hotspot. If you seek almost guaranteed sightings of many different animals, you might

## THERE'S A LOT TO BE SAID FOR REINING IN EXPECTATIONS AND ADAPTING YOUR MINDSET... THE SEARCH FOR WILDLIFE IS AN ADVENTURE TO ENJOY

consider a classic destination like the Mara-Serengeti or Kruger. But if you prefer more remote wilderness with fewer vehicles, you may be better suited to a lesser-known national park or a conservancy, which tend to have plenty of wildlife but few tourists.

The greatest risk of feeling let down is from not getting to see what you wanted. Finding specific animals or interesting behaviour takes time, patience and perseverance. This can mean hours of searching, watching and waiting. It can also involve tense decisions: do you stay with the two cheetahs who look like they might be about to hunt, or do you follow a tip that there's a leopard on the other side of the river? Stick or spin?

There's a lot to be said for reining in expectations and adapting your mindset. Rather than worrying about it or seeing it as a chore, the search for wildlife is an adventure to enjoy. Soak up the sights, sounds and smells – there are far worse ways to spend time than exploring African landscapes. Enjoy the time spent sitting in a vehicle watching a group of animals that look like they might get up to something.

Take your time, and don't be too fixed on what you have to see. It pays to be open to other, perhaps less obvious, animals your guide recommends or points out – rock agamas and dik-diks can be just as fascinating as a pride of lions. Slow down. Trying to spot every species in a national park in just a few days means you'll end up with a camera full of poor photos and not much in the way of memories. And take the time to learn about what you're

seeing – it always adds to the experience.

Appreciating wildlife isn't just about seeing iconic animals and moments of high drama. There are plenty of gentler encounters to enjoy. One of my most memorable was spending peaceful hours on a grassy plateau in the Simien mountains in Ethiopia, photographing geladas as they played and munched on grass.

Rather than expecting to have everything on demand, consider every sighting and moment a bonus. Nature rarely disappoints. It just might throw up surprises that are outside the set ideas you arrive with. You never know what you'll find, especially if you are not too rigidly focused on a select few species.

At dinner one night on safari, the woman sitting opposite told me: "Big cats and kills. That's what I tell my guides as soon as I land: I want to see big cats and kills."

As a wildlife lover and photographer, I've witnessed many kinds of remarkable animal action, including the rare sight of a leopard hunting an impala by leaping out of a baobab tree. But I don't see hunts or kills as the be-all and end-all of a safari. Watching and capturing family interactions, tenderness, play and other moments of animal life are just as fascinating, if not more so.

Obsessing about hunts or focusing only on one species means you risk missing out on so much – not noticing colourful bee-eaters, quarrelling hippos or monkeys playing in the grass.

I'm not saying there isn't a benefit to having a clear focus. Sometimes, for photographic assignments, there are animals or behaviours I need to concentrate on. Having your own interests or passions is good, rather than running around hastily snapping every animal you see.

But an open mind is a good thing on safari. Too much tunnel vision and you're likely to miss out on extraordinary sights outside your limited view. Always be open to something new.

Above all, there are two important things to keep in mind. First, how lucky you are to be here on a planet filled with such remarkable animals, people and scenery. And second: if all else fails, on safari you're never far away from a cold beer or a G&T. 

### Loving nature:

Don't let the rain get in the way of your game-viewing: it reveals a different character of the wildlife. This baboon cradling her young was photographed by Yaron Schmid, and was a monthly winner in the Greatest Maasai Mara Photography of the Year in 2020. Buy prints for conservation at [www.thegreatestmaasaimara.com](http://www.thegreatestmaasaimara.com)







# GETTING BUSH-READY

The quicker you understand and familiarise yourself with your new environment, the more you will absorb and appreciate throughout your time on safari.

BY **ROGER PARRY**

## WHAT CAN YOU HEAR?

Be still and just listen, let the sounds come to you – vehicles, voices, pots clashing, animal calls. Each tells a tale. In the bush, sounds (both un-natural and natural) are critical indicators of what is happening around you, what animals are near and what they may be doing. To familiarise yourself more quickly, listen to audio recordings of animals before you leave home.



## WHAT CAN YOU SMELL?

Breathe in. What do you detect? Food cooking, campfire smoke, diesel fumes from your safari vehicle, water, rain, fruit, flowers, dung (very specific odours for each species)? Scents reveal much. For example, a strong smell of a dead animal (combined with other indicators) could indicate a predator kill.



## WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

Most of us quickly interpret what we see, but we tend to take this for granted. In urban environments, sights are very angular: straight walls, windows, doors, rooves; flat roads with signs that help us to navigate. Sights become familiar, but bombard us with information that we subconsciously ignore.

In the bush, there are few straight lines, and colours and shapes are more subtle. People from cities see trees and bushes like a wall, so we need to learn to look *through* vegetation, not

at it, to see movement, shapes and contrasting colours within it – the flick of an ear or tail, or shapes and colour of an animal. Scan the bush from right to left: most people miss things when looking left to right because that is the way they read.

Other sights act as visual clues, such as smoke from a campfire or vultures thermalling above a kill. There are loads of signs in the bush – tracks, bent grass and the like. We need to learn how to interpret them.



**Tuning in.** A guest at Kigelia Ruaha camp takes a moment to connect with her new environment.

When you first arrive in camp, resist the common temptation to head out right away in search of animals. Rather, make time at the outset to acclimatise to your new environment – you want to become part of it, instead of someone misplaced. It will stand you in good stead later, allowing you to appreciate your safari so much more.

How we interact with our surroundings is very different depending on where we live. If you live in a city, you will know the potential dangers and how to avoid them – traffic, people on the sidewalk, unsafe areas. A San bushman in the Kalahari will have a very different experience – all senses tuned to his natural environment where his survival depends on identifying possible dangers there. Imagine a Londoner hearing a lion roar on a camping trip or a bushman hearing an ambulance siren in Johannesburg. Both in unfamiliar situations, with increased anxiety levels as a result.

People brought up in a city tend to block out their senses due to information overload – there's just too many sounds, smells and sights coming at you fast. In nature, you want to re-tune your senses, improving your ability to understand what is happening around you by increasing the information flow through your senses.





### WHAT CAN YOU FEEL?

Is it hot, cold, dry, wet? Be aware of any changes so that you can be more prepared, with the right clothing and provisions. Guides use touch as a clue to animal presence and behaviour: the dryness of dung or a leaf broken by animals feeding may indicate how recently the animal has been through the area. The onset of dew or a drop in temperature may trigger activity in certain species.



### WHAT CAN YOU TASTE?

Caution should be applied before tasting anything in the bush. Anything that is sour, bitter or leaves a burning sensation could be toxic and should be avoided. This sense is mainly used for assessing food quality.



### THE 'SIXTH SENSE'.

One often hears of people who live in nature being able to pick up on situations that most of us can't – they have a *feeling* of something about to happen. To me, this is a combination of all the other senses, of being finely tuned in to what they are telling us. On safari, your guide will be your biggest asset. He or she will have a strong understanding of the environment. Tap into their knowledge. The quicker you get accustomed to the bush, the more you will get out of it.

**ROGER PARRY** IS THE WILDLIFE AND RESEARCH MANAGER AT THE VICTORIA FALLS WILDLIFE TRUST

## WHY LISTENING IS IMPORTANT

BY **DEREK SOLOMON**

**Humans are very** visual creatures and, generally, we let our eyes be our guides. But the bush teems with vocal animals and insects, creating a wonderful orchestra of life, and we are not likely to even notice this unless we concentrate and focus on the sound environment.

A good way to start is by closing your eyes (so not to be distracted by visual clues), cupping your hands behind your ears and pushing them slightly forward to create bigger sound-catchers. Practise this at home before venturing out into nature.

Listen to the sound of wind rustling leaves, the gurgle of a stream tumbling over stone. Slow your thoughts down. What else can you hear?

The buzz of insects. The tap of a woodpecker searching for food. The crack of a branch breaking

or the crunch of sand underfoot as an elephant walks by.

Before dawn there may be a lion roaring, declaring his territory and assuring the pride that all is ok. Perhaps a spontaneous hyena whoop, keeping in contact with the rest of the clan. Daybreak is usually heralded by a riotous chorus of birds declaring their territory, attracting a mate or seeing off rival males – it's a busy time for our avian friends.

Baboons bark "wha-hoo" as they rouse themselves from their treetop roost and come down to forage. As the day warms up, dwarf mongooses chirrup to each other while they sun themselves before venturing out to feed.

Time with elephants is always entertaining, whether it is the snap of breaking branches or pulling grass, blowing dust over themselves or a gentle rumble

urging the herd to move on.

As evening approaches, frogs become active. In the summer months their ardent 'love songs', looking for a mate, can be heard from afar.

And when night falls, the sounds become more noticeable – it is time for predators to hunt. Listen for the sawing rasp of a leopard and the responding alarm snorts from antelope and galloping hooves as they make their escape. There may be a loud "prrrp" from a pair of Scops owls calling at regular intervals as they embark on their courtship conversation.

Paying attention to the sounds of the bush really does enrich a safari. There is so much going on in the natural world and we can discover and interpret much of it simply by listening to what these creatures have to say. 🦏



DEREK SOLOMON

### Hear hear:

A specialised sound safari with Derek Solomon allows you to eavesdrop on the wild using equipment to amplify the natural world through individual headphones. The experience has been described as "mind-blowing" by guests.





# WHERE TO LOOK?

You're heading out on your game drive, camera and binoculars at the ready. But how do you find the wildlife? Here are a few tips to boost your chances.

BY **MIKE UNWIN**



We asked what advice you would offer fellow wildlife lovers heading on safari...

**Don't go with a list of all the animals you want to see. Wildlife never appears on demand and you can never be sure exactly what you'll find.**

**STEFANIA MANCINI,**  
SAN MARINO

Take a silent two or three minutes. Switch off the engine, no chat, no fidgeting – just relax and immerse yourselves. The guides enjoy it, and other guests soon realise that sound and smell are just as important.

Make sure you have a panoramic option on your camera, and an easily adjustable zoom of at least 400mm. Do a first edit of your photos each day so they don't accumulate.  
**DON MATLOCK,**  
AUSTRALIA

BRING LOW EXPECTATIONS AND A SENSE OF HUMOUR. OH, AND PLENTY OF MEMORY CARDS FOR YOUR CAMERA.  
**JOCK BRADLEY,** USA





SHERRY RIX

### CHECK THE WHOLE VIEW

Our eyes often instinctively search the mid-distance, but wildlife can be anywhere. Scan the horizon – you might spy a distant giraffe or circling vultures. Equally, check out your immediate vicinity: it's easy to overlook a chameleon in a roadside bush.

### USE BINOCULARS

Not just for a better view of wildlife but also to find it. Whenever you stop, scan methodically. Scrutinise promising spots: large trees, river banks, rocky outcrops.

### WINDOWS DOWN

If not in an open vehicle, keep your windows down. This frees your ears and nose. The cracking of a branch may betray an elephant. Meanwhile, the scent of dust and dung reminds you that you're out in the bush, not stuck in a glass bubble.

### PAUSE

Stop as often as you can. You'll see more when you're stationary and with the engine off. Choose promising spots – a raised viewpoint, a river loop – and position yourself with the light behind you. If nothing is

immediately visible, give it time. Things will appear.

### MID-MORNING ACTION

It's easy to slacken off when the day starts to heat up and that dawn predator promise fades. Try not to. Mid-morning means waterhole time for many drinkers, plus raptors riding the thermals.

### TRACKS AND SIGNS

You can still be a tracker, even in a vehicle. Scan the ground for fresh prints and droppings. You'll need to drive slowly, which you should be doing anyway.

### CALL IT

If you think you might have seen something, don't be shy. There's

no shame in stopping for rhino rocks and lion tussocks. We've all been there. Who knows, next time...

### WATCH OTHER ANIMALS

Prey animals will often give away predators. Watch for alarm signals: barking baboons or staring impala could reveal a leopard; agitated birds flocking to a tree might signal a snake.

### SHARE THE JOY

On safari we love to feel exclusive. But if you meet another vehicle, stop to chat. Find out what they're looking at and share what you've seen. Always approach carefully, so as not to scare their sighting or block their view.

### EARLY RADAR

In the pre-dawn darkness before departure, allow time to listen to the soundscape. Roaring lions nearby may help set your direction. 🦁

### KEEP EVERYTHING TO HAND

Don't pack vital stuff (camera lens, water bottle) in the boot. You may need them just when you can't get them.

If I was to take one thing, it would be binoculars. I write a daily journal to remind me what we saw. And trust your guides: you may witness an event like no other simply because you let the guide do his or her job.  
**CARRIE BURHENN, USA**

**Keep looking for wildlife, including behind the vehicle. Once we saw a lioness emerge into the clearing we had just left.**

**ANDREW BROWN, UK**

Go with an open mind; try not to make the safari all about the Big Five. Take in the scenery, and you will see and learn so much.  
**VAL EDLIN, UK**

**Spend as long as you can in one area. It takes time to get to know a place, which animals hang out where, which are the best waterholes.**

**ANNE AND IAN WILKINSON, UK**

Sometimes the best memories don't come from a photo. Take time to put the camera down and let your observations from a 360-degree angle take over.  
**SHANE WEISFELD, CANADA**





ECOTRAINING (3)



# BEST BEHAVIOUR

Whether you choose to go on a self-drive safari or with a qualified guide, having even a basic knowledge of animal behaviour can open up a world of exciting encounters

Elephant are pulling up clumps of lush grass with their trunks. Feasting. Content. Or are they?

Take a closer look. One brings her trunk up to her mouth, but there's no food being ingested. What does this mean?

When elephants become aware of someone's presence, they will pretend to feed while observing you, trying to decipher your intentions. You are not yet a threat, but they are on alert. You are too close for comfort.

Understanding this type of behaviour can greatly enhance your wildlife watching experience. But what are the key elements to look for? Guide training company **Ecotraining** shares a few pointers...

## HABITAT

Animals display a specific set of habitat requirements, which may be influenced by factors such as vegetation, prey, water and temperature ranges.

For example, when looking for white rhino, focus on open woodland habitats with grass plains (grass forms 99 per cent of their diet) and sufficient thicket cover. Head towards water in the late afternoon, because this is when they tend to drink.

Black rhino, on the other hand, can be found in a wide range of habitats, from incredibly arid areas to woodland. They feed on an array of plants and sometimes fruit, and are more likely to drink in the early afternoon and at night.

## WATER DEPENDENCY

The frequency that a species requires water assists with locating them. Buffalo usually drink twice a day – in the morning and afternoon. Therefore, you are likely to see them returning to a specific water source. The presence of large herds and their dependency on water often leads to lion ambushing them at waterholes. During the dry winter months, the predictability

of game coming to a particular waterhole becomes more reliable because seasonal pans have dried up.

## TIME OF DAY

In the early mornings, you will find certain animals soaking up the sun. Try to find those species first, especially lion and leopard, while they are still active. Elephant and buffalo should not be your priority that early. Also, learn if an animal is crepuscular, diurnal or nocturnal.

Crepuscular: there is usually a 45 minute gap in which to see bat hawks each day (at sunrise and sunset), so be prepared. It will help if you know where bat colonies are roosting, because bats (as the name implies) are their favourite meal.

Diurnal: perhaps surprisingly, wild dog and cheetah are generally only active during the day; this prevents them encountering other predators with whom they compete directly.





**Clockwise from far left:** Studying the behaviour of a herd of elephants in Mashatu Game Reserve, Botswana; Mike Anderson explains how the different vegetation attracts certain species; Guide Japer Visser tracking in Karongwe Private Game Reserve, South Africa

Nocturnal: lions mostly hunt at night (with the exception of winter and cool, overcast days) and are inactive for up to 20 hours a day.

#### CLIMATIC CONDITIONS

As a broad generalisation, in winter you will find most grazers feed on the eastern-facing slopes in the early morning, where temperatures are warmer. Progressively, throughout the day, they will move closer to the plains. In summer, they start at the plains and move to the slopes in the afternoon. However, crocodiles spend the early parts of the morning on west-facing riverbanks; in the late afternoon you'll find them on the eastern side.

Wind also has an impact. It puts lions, for example, in a favourable position when hunting, because it conceals their smell. The aardvark, though, becomes inactive during windy nights because it can no longer hear or smell predators. 

## Watch wildlife like an artist

When you have a pencil or brush in your hand, you tend to look at a subject in much more detail, paying greater attention to shape, colour and movement.

**Mary-Anne Bartlett** runs Art Safari, a company that takes interested artists of all skill levels on painting holidays to several countries in Africa. To capture their subjects, participants practice truly studying what's in front of them: distances between focal points; angles of the flow of a river or hanging branch; the curve of an animal's back; the height comparison between members of a herd; and of course the subtle variations in colour tone.

On safari, most of us don't pay enough attention to these details, yet they tell us so much about animal behaviour and its quest for survival. Why is a leopard that particular shade of... yellow? brown? How is it different to the colour of the surrounding bush? What does the shape of an elephant's head tell us about its gender? Where do the horns of a buffalo actually meet – or do they? How much shorter are a hyena's hind legs than its forelegs (and why)?

"When painting wildlife on safari, there's a moment when you can't plan, you just act instinctively," says Mary-Anne. "However, there are techniques to learn, looking for lines and shapes and tone. It is important to stay alert, look hard, observing every detail

before simplifying the animal on the page.

"The adrenaline of sketching and the keen observation involved enhances the safari experience and sharpens the memories. The more practice you have at speedy drawing, the better."

Sketching your sightings in the field is a great way of forcing yourself to pay attention in the moment. And if you refer to your sketchbook to continue

to paint when back home it will expand your safari experience further.

To get you started, here's five tips Mary-Anne offers for observing and painting wildlife:

**1 Simplify the subject's main lines and shapes, leaving space**

**2 Check proportions and angles, adding internal shapes and outline guidelines**

**3 Place the main features – eyes, ears and nose**

**4 Keep colours simple, minimise detail and soften edges**

**5 Paint fast, wet and loose for movement, starting with light colours, leaving dark colours and detail til last**



**MARY-ANNE BARTLETT** RUNS FREE SPEED SKETCHING AND OTHER WORKSHOPS ONLINE. SEE [BIT.LY/TA95ART](https://bit.ly/TA95ART)





# LESSONS FROM BEHIND THE LENS

We're all indebted to the filmmakers that spend considerable time and effort creating the spectacular documentaries that bring the majesty of the natural world into our living rooms. But what can we learn from them that might enrich our own wildlife-watching experience on safari?

BY **NEIL NIGHTINGALE** AND **KAREN BASS**

**T**ravellers on safari and wildlife filmmakers share many of the same ambitions: to seek out intimate and exciting wildlife encounters, to witness fascinating behaviour and to experience the unique atmosphere of wild Africa. From over three decades of making natural history films, these are some of the lessons we've learnt that we've also found useful for watching wildlife on safari.

## **PATIENCE**

Filming the split second that a Nile crocodile leaps from the water to catch a drinking wildebeest is a particularly difficult challenge. Once a year, on their long migration, wildebeest approach the Grumeti River in the Serengeti to drink. Giant crocs are waiting. But precisely where and when might the most dramatic encounter happen?

Day after day we tracked the approaching herds, placing hides on the riverbank at likely spots, and then waited, and waited... for one week, two, eventually three. Finally, patience paid off. A croc exploded almost clean out of the water, right in front of our cameras, to snatch a wildebeest. The results, captured in ultra-slow motion, were spectacular.

On safari most of us don't have time to spend weeks waiting for such a dramatic event. However, the more time you can spend with animals, the better your chance of experiencing amazing behaviour. Staying longer at fewer locations can often be more rewarding.

## **BODY LANGUAGE**

Filming gorillas in the Virunga mountains felt like joining a human family enjoying a picnic. Their behaviour was so similar to our own, with playful babies, mischievous youngsters, tender mums and a stern looking dad. Just as in any human society, personal etiquette was essential to us being

**NEIL NIGHTINGALE**  
AND **KAREN BASS** ARE  
AWARD-WINNING WILDLIFE  
FILMMAKERS WHOSE  
PRODUCTIONS FOR THE BBC,  
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC AND  
OTHERS HAVE ENTERTAINED  
AUDIENCES FOR OVER  
THIRTY YEARS.





accepted into the group. We had to be polite, approach slowly, sit down quietly, keep our voices low and not wave our arms or stare directly into the eyes of the silverback. The gorillas accepted us and over several days we were able to capture many wonderfully poignant moments.

When watching wildlife, body language is especially important when visiting our closest relatives, whether they're gorillas in Rwanda or Uganda, bonobos in the Congo, geladas in Ethiopia, or even a troop of vervet monkeys on the verandah of your room.

### RIGHT PLACE, RIGHT TIME

One of the tougher shoots was filming wild dogs in the Okavango. No matter how early we set off, travelling in biting cold through the darkness to find them before dawn, they were always active by the time we reached them.

Day after day we tracked their hunts, often losing them in the dense bush. But our early morning starts eventually paid off

and we filmed a successful hunt. We were amazed by their apparently chaotic co-operation and surprised too by the speed of the final kill – far quicker than any lion or cheetah kill we'd ever witnessed.

Only by being with the wild dogs at the crack of dawn were we able to witness their most dramatic behaviour. Most savannah hunters are more active in the cooler conditions early and late in the day, so an early rise is a good idea. It's also worth staying out until sunset and beyond. Late one evening we witnessed the dogs chase a leopard up a tree – an extraordinary moment.

### GREAT GUIDES

Some years ago, we spent a few days in Samburu National Park in the company of elephant expert David Daballen. As elephant families drank from the Ewaso Nyiro River, he was able to identify each one, describe their individual characters and tell us which were related. We realised this would make a fascinating

wildlife soap opera. It was developed as a TV series called *The Secret Life of Elephants*, and David became one of the presenters, able to share his stories with millions of viewers.

Experts and guides with detailed local knowledge are essential for successful filming and we put a great deal of effort into finding them. When planning your travels, it's really worthwhile quizzing your agent about this aspect of the trip.

### LISTENING

There's nothing more atmospheric than the sounds of an African night. The haunting calls of nocturnal predators can raise the hairs on the back of your neck, while a soothing chorus of doves and bulbuls brings relief at the first glimmer of dawn.

We go to great lengths to record soundtracks at each location, at different times of day and night, because sounds are as important as images in capturing the essence of Africa. They're also one of the most enriching experiences of any safari. Take time to be quiet, listen and immerse yourself completely in the atmosphere of the wild.

### SEEING BEYOND THE OBVIOUS

Our films on the deserts of southern Africa have often featured charismatic wildlife like elephants and meerkats. However, some of the most fascinating stories we've covered have been about the smallest animals: beetles that drink from fog, snakes that ambush from under the sand and even a tiny frog that gives itself away only by its haunting nocturnal calls.

On safari, if you look beyond the usual wildlife, you too can be fascinated by the less obvious. From dung beetles to dragonflies, acacia ants to chameleons, each has its own surprising story of survival.

### A FINAL THOUGHT

Much of Africa changes dramatically through the seasons, and we often capture its dynamic nature with time-lapse photography. Even if you return to the same location, it will be different each time and you'll always be surprised by the drama of wild Africa. 🦒



NEIL NIGHTINGALE AND KAREN BASS





TONY PARK

# PRETEND YOU'RE ON **A GAME COUNT**

Each October, every waterhole in Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park is monitored for 24 hours and every animal spotted is recorded. The data is critical for wildlife management. But the tricks employed by the counters could enrich every safari-goer's wildlife-watching experience.

BY **TONY PARK**

"mpala!" I'd never seen anyone as excited as my Dutch friend Caroline when she saw the first of a herd of these ubiquitous antelope wandering out of the bush in the afternoon.

It had been a quiet few hours in north-west Hwange, so the first animal to come into view was a cause for celebration. The Game Count is the perfect antidote to the 'Ferrari Safari': take a break from speeding around the bush looking for animals, sit back and wait for them to come to you.

The idea is to count and sex everything you see, and work out how old it is, over a 24-hour period, from midday to midday.

Here are some tricks I've

learned from participating in 22 annual Counts, which could enrich any wildlife-watching trip.

**LOOK.** Arriving at a waterhole, it's a good idea to first pick the best place to count from. See that big shady tree? It might look inviting, but if its bark is shiny and there's a game trail leading to it, then it's likely you'll be sharing the spot with an elephant.

Check your compass (bring one). In the southern hemisphere the sun tracks from east to west via north, so an ideal position to count from is with your back to north, facing south – that way you won't have the sun in your eyes at first or last light.



**WAIT.** Hold off counting and recording straight away. If female impala start emerging from the bush, don't begin counting until you see the male. The guy with the horns will be bringing up the rear, a sign the whole herd has arrived.

The same goes for zebras – a typical herd structure is a stallion in the rear, with a harem of females and young in front.

However, if a big herd of buffalo emerges over the horizon (we've regularly seen herds of 1000 or more around Nantwich Lodge), quickly pick a 'choke point', such as two trees, and focus on that. Count each line of buffalos as they pass between the markers.

**READ** your field guide or draw on your own knowledge of mammals and their behaviour. This is the time to bring your A-Game as a safari enthusiast, or use the 24 hours as a chance to learn.

**SEX AND AGE.** Herd structure and appendages can be a guide to the animals' gender, but there are other indicators. Adult female and male elephants have different shaped heads – the female's forehead is squared-off, at an angle of almost 90 degrees, while the male's is sloped back or rounded.

That big elephant leading a herd to water will be a matriarchal female; if her latest baby fits under her tummy, then the calf is under 12 months old. The two or three big dudes trailing a hundred metres behind the herd will be, well, dudes.

Hwange is a great place to see roan and sable antelope, especially around Nantwich Lodge. Both the males and females have horns, however male sable are darker than females and turn black. Male

roan have thicker, longer horns than the females.

**LISTEN.** Many animals give alarm calls when predators are nearby. If the baboons are giving their *wah-hoo* call or the impala are barking, start scanning for leopard, lion or cheetah. If the guinea fowl go crazy, look up: there might be a martial eagle overhead (there's a check list for birds to be recorded, but not counted).

**STAY SAFE.** Game Count is the only time of year when people get to stay out in the bush overnight. Stay in your vehicle (or bird hide) after dark. Don't walk around during the day – movement will scare animals away and you never know what's around. It was not until 4am, on one count, that I learned there had been five lionesses sleeping all day 100 metres away from where I was counting.

Take sunscreen, a hat and more drinking water and cold-weather clothes than you think you need – the days are hot and the nights can be freezing. Pack sandwiches for lunch and a pre-prepared meal for dinner – dawn and dusk can be busy at the waterhole and you don't want to be faffing about cooking.

**STAY ALERT.** On the shady stoep at Nantwich Lodge in 2021, we had a team of six, but you could be in a smaller group, so break the count into two-hour shifts. Before dark, boil the kettle and fill a Thermos for instant coffee and soups to keep you awake (note – spotted hyenas love the smell of chicken soup).

**NIGHT COUNTING** is a challenge, but can be rewarding. At Nantwich we saw civet, African wild cat and hyena. Unless you can afford a military-

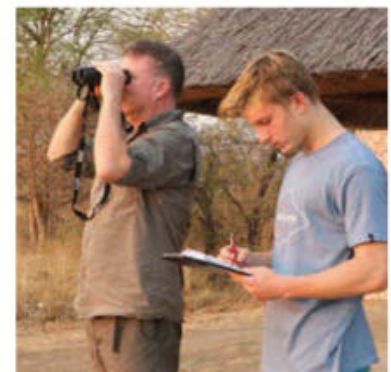
grade night vision device, forget it – cheaper models don't cut it. The count is conducted during a full moon and you'll be surprised how well a good pair of binoculars works on a moonlit night.

### SCAN WITH YOUR BINOCULARS FROM RIGHT TO LEFT.

Westerners learn to read on a page from left to right and that's how we normally scan. Forcing yourself to look the other way, from right to left, will slow your gaze down and you'll more readily notice movement and unusual shapes.

Game Counts can vary, depending on the weather and other variables. Years of good rainfall can lead to 'smaller' counts as the wildlife disperses. At Nantwich in 2021 we counted nearly 500 animals in 24 hours and recorded 15 different species – the highest number at any spot in the park.

Like all safaris, it's the luck of the draw. But one thing I can guarantee – if you're having a slow day counting, that impala is going to be the most exciting thing you've seen in a long time. 



TONY PARK

### Who's counting?

When faced with large herds – like the buffalo, opposite, at Nantwich waterhole – it can help to do an initial quick count of groups of about ten animals, then come back for a more thorough count if you have time. It helps to designate roles: one person to count and the other to keep records.

**TONY PARK** IS THE AUTHOR OF 19 NOVELS SET IN AFRICA, THE LATEST BEING *BLOOD TRAIL*

### HOW TO TAKE PART

The **Hwange Game Census** is the longest continuously running wildlife count in southern Africa. It provides vital information for wildlife researchers and the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Service. This, and similar counts in Mana Pools and Gonarezhou national parks, is organised by Wildlife and Environment Zimbabwe (WEZ). Counters must join WEZ (US\$50 per family for non-Zimbabweans), book in advance and pay a counting fee. The 2022 count will be held from 7-10 October, with the actual 24-hour census taking part on October 8-9 (attendance at the pre-count briefing on October 7 is mandatory). For details, visit <https://wezmat.org/game-counts/>

To take part in the Hwange Game Count from Nantwich Lodge in 2022, email [info@hideawaysafrica.com](mailto:info@hideawaysafrica.com)



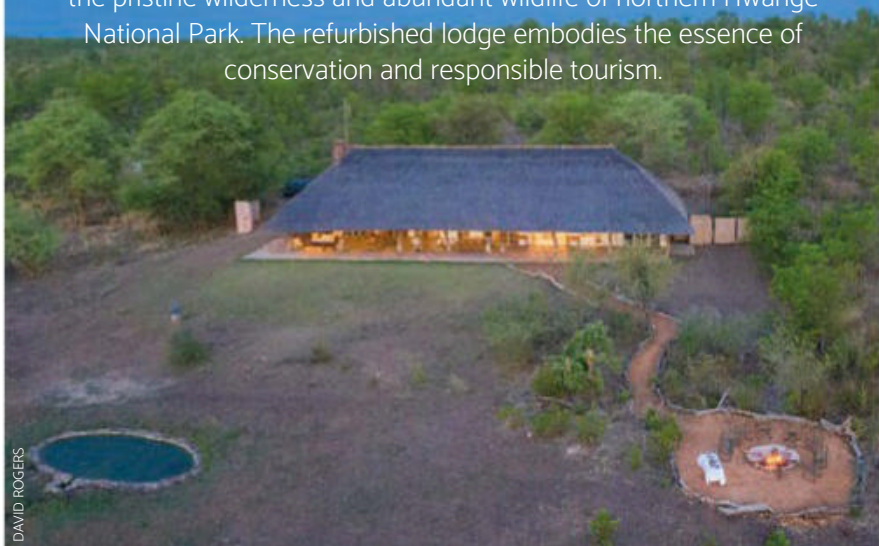


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# DOWNTIME? WHAT DOWNTIME?

Your wildlife experience needn't be confined to your game drives. In fact, there's abundant opportunities right on your doorstep. Literally.

BY MIKE UNWIN

I'm back from my game drive, just settling down to check my photos. Suddenly I hear a squeal of terror from the waterhole. A kill! Peering closer, I can make out the gleam of writhing coils: a stripe-bellied sand-snake has just captured a frog and is now stretching its jaws around the still-struggling amphibian. Amazingly, another sand-snake has joined the fray and is attempting to swallow the frog from the other end. The two combatants twist and thrash, sinuous bodies intertwining as they contest the prize.

I say 'waterhole'. Actually, it's a bird bath. I'm sitting outside my chalet during pre-lunch downtime at a camp in Zambia's South Luangwa National Park. It's been a great wildlife day already – our game drive brought elephants, giraffes, even a leopard – but for sheer drama, nothing tops the life-and-death struggle now unfolding in front of me.

Downtime is crucial to any day on safari. After your early morning start and the huge brunch that inevitably follows, you've earned your R&R – a chance to catch up on sleep, check out the pool and generally recharge batteries, literally and figuratively. Fair enough. But don't imagine that just because you've switched off, the wildlife show only resumes once you hit the road again. Yes, midday sees a lull in some activities, but there's always something going on. The relentless struggle for survival does not stop for a lunch break.

With a few hours to spare, camps and lodges can be very productive places. Many look out over water, so if you want to settle down with a book, why not find somewhere with a view and keep one

eye open for action? Or take a gentle stroll: camp is often the best place for a closer look at smaller animals such as bush squirrels or tree agamas, that seldom get top-billing on a game drive. Certain creatures – dassies, dikdiks, even bushbuck – can become surprisingly confiding inside a camp, while birdbaths and picnic tables attract a procession of feathered visitors, including some species that are hard to observe closely elsewhere.

The excitement continues after dark. If your camp is fenced, try taking a torchlit after-dinner stroll. You may find a hyena pacing the perimeter or a genet foraging for scraps. On my last visit to the Kruger Park I had close in-camp encounters with both honey badger and African wildcat, two species that are very hard to find on a game drive, and my only ever sighting of a striped polecat (aka zorilla) came one evening at a campsite in Namibia's Naukluft National Park, when it scampered between my washing-up bowl and cool box.

In unfenced camps, you should stay put after dark, for obvious reasons. But even sitting on your deck, you might pick out a calling scops owl in a torch beam, and enjoy a cornucopia of mini-beasts – from sausage flies to praying mantises – drawn to the light, and snapped up by lurking frogs and geckos. What's more, you can tune in to the nocturnal bush soundtrack. I remember passing one fruitless day searching for predators in Hwange, Zimbabwe, then after returning to camp, being amazed to hear lion, leopard, spotted hyena and black-backed jackal close by, all within minutes of lighting the fire.

For many birders, downtime is always up time. They're on full alert

from the moment they arrive, with the likes of crowned plover and hadeda ibis ticked before clearing Arrivals, and breakfast at their airport hotel a chance to find sunbirds, weavers and white-eyes. Long drives between parks also offer rich pickings – notably raptors, such as black-shouldered kite and long-crested eagle, which love to perch on telegraph poles. And it's not only birds: I've had many memorable sightings while 'en route' between safari destinations, including black mamba and my first ever caracal.

If you're lucky enough to have scheduled a beach break, don't think you can escape the wildlife there either. I remember planning two nights of post-safari R&R with my family at the gorgeous Ras Kutani resort on Tanzania's Indian Ocean coast, in order to 'wind down' from our week in Ruaha. I had looked forward to catching up on my reading, maybe get in a game of Scrabble or two. But I soon found blue, vervet and colobus monkeys wandering the grounds by day, civets and bushbabies on the prowl by night, and, down on the beach, green turtles popping their venerable heads out of the surf. I was thrilled. And exhausted.

Ultimately, of course, it's each to their own. This is your hard-earned holiday, after all, and you should use your time however you like. But just don't go thinking that the natural world presses pause while you take a nap, or that wildlife only appears where and when the itinerary tells it to. As for me, I'll sleep when I get home. I've travelled a long way to spend a few precious days in paradise. Why would I waste a moment? 





**This pic:** Chameleons are among the treats often found in camp grounds, here at Camp Okavango **Right:** A bushbuck visits the bar at Camp Xakanaxa, Moremi

DESERT AND DELTA SAFARIS  
CHIAWA SAFARIS



DESERT AND DELTA SAFARIS



CHIAWA SAFARIS

  
DON'T IMAGINE  
THAT JUST  
BECAUSE YOU'VE  
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FOR A LUNCH  
BREAK



KER AND DOWNEY BOTSWANA

**Left:** Enjoying a midday visit at Old Mondoro, Lower Zambezi NP, **This pic:** Golden weaver nest-building at Kanana in the Okavango Delta

**Soak it in:** Relaxing by the pool doesn't mean you shouldn't have half an eye on the bush in front of you, here at Sarara, in the Namunyak Wildlife Conservancy in Kenya's Matthews Mountain range

SARARA







# ATTENTION TO DETAIL

Wildlife comes in all sizes and forms, and some memorable sightings can be had right in camp – sometimes without you even leaving your room!

BY **SUE WATT**

On my first trip to Kenya, I was enjoying a beer in our campsite bar near Lake Naivasha when my friend unexpectedly asked: “How do you feel about bugs?”

Her eyes were focused keenly on the top of my head. “I think I’m ok with them,” I replied, bemused. “Good,” she said. “Because there’s a strange, long green thing crawling in your hair...”

That strange green thing was a praying mantis. I later discovered that these are voracious predators – albeit harmless to humans – with the female of the species even known to eat her partner after mating. To me, it was simply a bizarre yet beautiful creature, about 10cm in length and resplendent in colour with a heart-shaped head, skinny legs and strong, almost muscular forearms, like a tiny bodybuilder on steroids.

Thus began my fascination with Africa’s critters, those small creatures so often

overshadowed in our quest to spot the bigger beasts, yet whose lives are equally as dramatic and as captivating.

Wander around any camp and you’ll discover a world of wonderful creepy crawlies. Perhaps you’ll find antlions digging their pits to trap their prey. Or an army of Matabele ants meticulously and mercilessly attacking a termite’s nest or collectively hissing as you stamp the ground nearby. Then there are the shimmering flashes of colour and elegance from butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies, and the singing of cicadas in the heat of the day. And at night, you’ll see myriad moths, spiders, beetles, and bugs drawn to lamps left on, their shadows dancing patterns in the light.

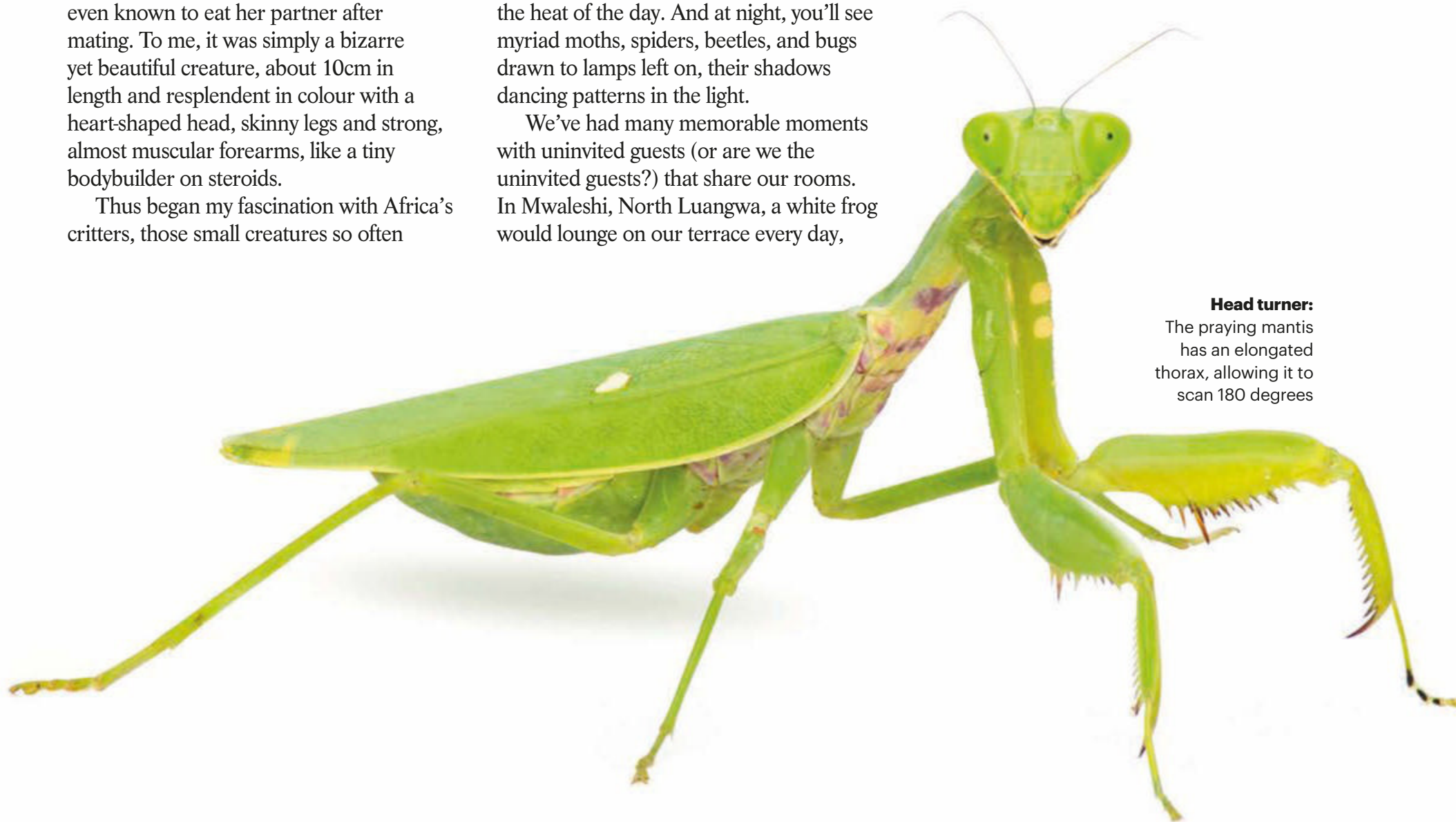
We’ve had many memorable moments with uninvited guests (or are we the uninvited guests?) that share our rooms. In Mwaleshi, North Luangwa, a white frog would lounge on our terrace every day,

lying motionless like an ornament basking in the sun. We called it Chalky.

And at Mkumuladzi Lodge, Malawi, a cheeky bushbaby stunned us by jumping from the rafters above our bed, dashing over to the table, picking up my glass and swiftly stealing a sip of G&T.

The following evening, a gecko showed its true colours. Normally seen as loveable little creatures wary of noise and light, their timidity belies a surprisingly violent streak. We watched in horror as the tiny reptile clamped a moth between its jaws and whacked it unrelentingly against the wall. When the gossamer-like wings, all gold and brown, had stopped their feeble fluttering, the gecko and its prey disappeared.

My favourite moment with little creatures was far more tranquil. It happened on our balcony in Congo’s Odzala National Park, when a tiny tree frog jumped onto my lap. Together, we sat in the darkness listening to elephants trumpeting from the forest and watching whimsical fireflies glowing in the dark, twinkling surreally like tiny stars. 



#### Head turner:

The praying mantis has an elongated thorax, allowing it to scan 180 degrees



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ADVENTURES ALOFT / MADA HOTELS

# ANGLE FINDER

Take a hike, launch a canoe, stand silently in a water-level hide, take to the skies, or lie on your stomach... Changing your viewpoint not only offers a varied perspective on Africa's wildlife, but it also makes for a more active and engaging adventure

BY **GRAEME GREEN**

**Z**ebra paraded along the ridge line as the sun rose over the Maasai Mara. A secretary bird stalked the ground for insects and snakes. Across the plains, topi, wildebeest and Thomson's gazelles grazed. A pair of large hyenas watched us from the hills, before slinking off to rest from a night of hunting.

This wildlife-rich scene in Olare Motorogi Conservancy, bordering Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve, was a sight to behold. But it felt all the more exhilarating because, instead of watching from a safari vehicle, our boots were on terra firma – just another one of the mammals enjoying the morning on the Mara's plains.

Walking safaris are a popular way to experience Africa's wilderness areas. A pleasant change from sitting in a vehicle, it's exciting to see lions, elephants, hippos, impalas and other animals from this ground level perspective. To some it may seem dangerous, but it's always felt safe and natural to me to take a walk in the incredible landscapes Africa offers;

**Top left:** Cycle safari at Chisa Busanga, Kafue National Park, Zambia  
**Left:** Looking down on the Maasai Mara plains from a hot air balloon  
**Above:** A mokoro ride reveals the secrets of the Okavango Delta



there is always an experienced guide and ranger, carrying a rifle, for protection.

On foot you feel less separated from nature. You see and hear details that you'd miss in a vehicle, such as wind whistling through acacia thorn trees and the 'guardian' ants that come out to protect them. You can also access places that vehicles can't reach, including car-free savannahs, forests, dry river beds and rocky outcrops for vantage points.

If there's a downside, it's that animals feel more threatened by humans on foot than in vehicles, so they tend to keep more of a distance. But the sightings you do get, like the curious giraffe that came to check us out – are all the more memorable for having your feet planted on the same soil.

There are plenty more alternatives to safari vehicles, each offering unique perspectives. Getting onto water in a canoe or a *mokoro* allows you to get low, at eye-level with the animals. Especially with photography, this perspective is far better than looking down diagonally on animals' heads from a vehicle. Floating quietly along, animals tend to again be less afraid of humans than if they're on foot, so you get to witness relatively undisturbed wildlife (although we were once mock-charged by a hippo who didn't enjoy sharing his river).

As with walking or canoeing, it feels like a privilege to ride a mountain bike or a horse in areas that are frequented by wild animals. There are restrictions about bikes being ridden inside many national parks and protected areas, though, so rides often take place in concessions outside parks or in private reserves. It can be a chance to visit local villages, too.

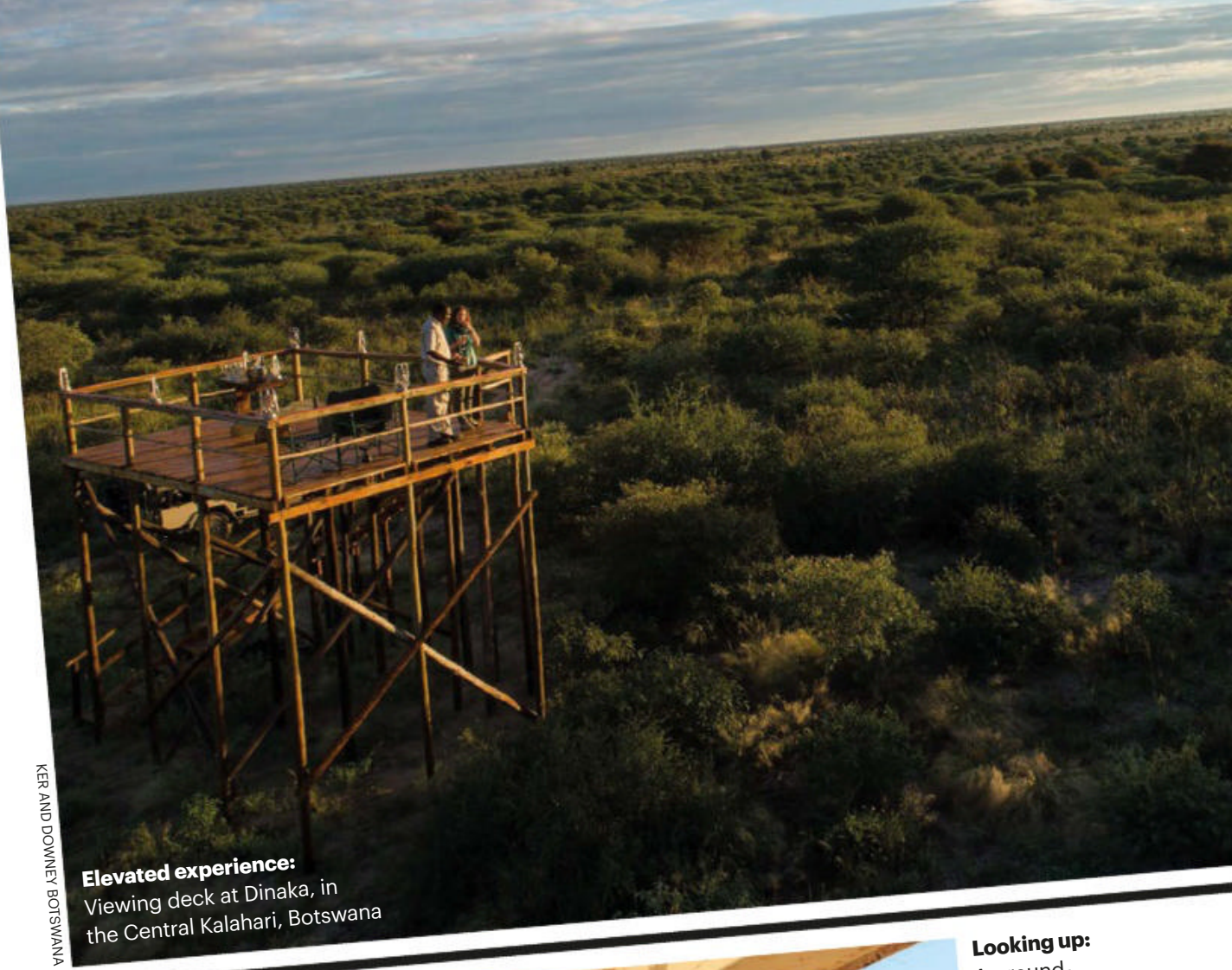
I've also surveyed some of Africa's national parks from the air. Taking to the skies – whether in a microlight, helicopter, plane or hot air balloon – offers a birds' eye view, enabling you to appreciate the immensity of the landscapes and

to notice the shapes and shadows of trees and other features of the habitat and the wildlife within in.

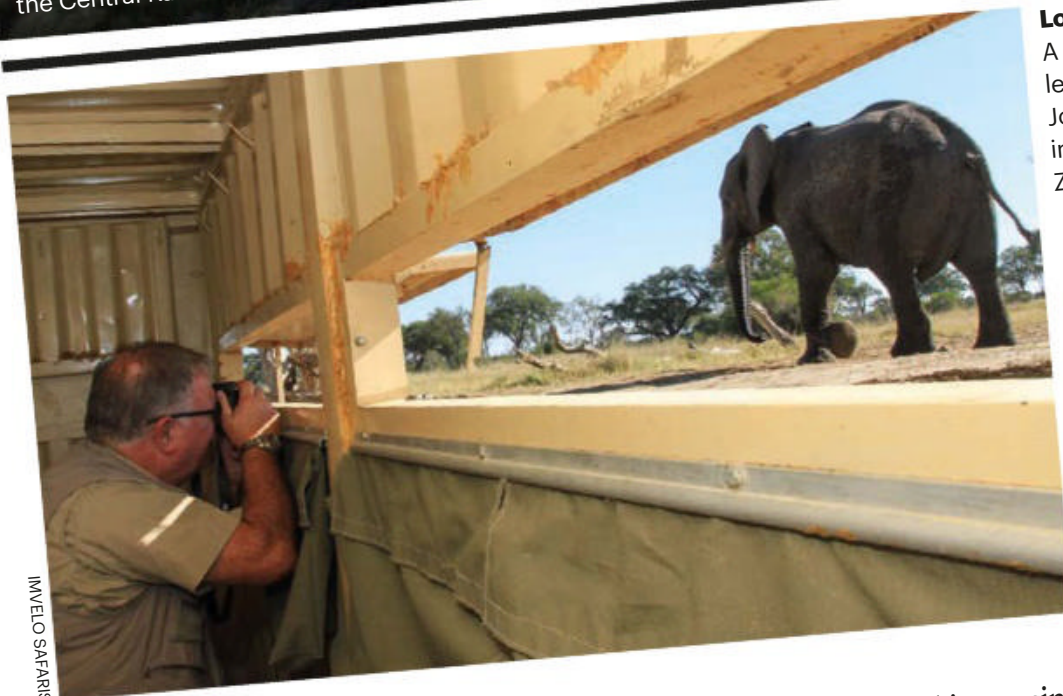
Many safari operators are working hard to provide new angles for wildlife photographers. Hides have risen in popularity, offering a chance to hang out quietly and unseen at watering holes, to observe 'local life', from lions to impala, coming in to drink. Photographers like the low, water level angle and the chance to play with mirror-like reflections. As a contrast, seek a raised platform to give height over a scene, enabling you to see further and get a better appreciation of the landscape. These are found in

many national parks, and increasing numbers of lodges or camps provide elevated sleep-out decks for a fully-immersive experience.

Some safari vehicles are being adapted to help wildlife lovers achieve different perspectives, with lower-level vehicles or sides that fold away, allowing photographers to lay down, closer to the animals' level. Even in standard vehicles, it helps to get low, perhaps using the front seat, next to the driver, instead of standing or sitting. Rather than looking down on them, you get to look Africa's wild beasts in the eye, which makes for a more intimate and rewarding experience. 📷



**Elevated experience:**  
Viewing deck at Dinaka, in  
the Central Kalahari, Botswana



**Looking up:**  
A ground-level hide at  
Jozibanani Camp  
in Hwange,  
Zimbabwe





Why race around looking for animals, when you can stay put and let them come to you?

WORDS AND PICTURES BY **MIKE UNWIN**

I'm in the Matambeni bird hide in South Africa's Kruger Park, sitting out a heatwave. It's late morning, and after a long, hot game drive, the cool shade of this simple wooden shelter is a blessed relief. Wildlife-wise, though, there's nothing's happening. I peer out at an apparently lifeless landscape. Drought has reduced the Letaba River to a few weed-choked mud holes, and the sun-bleached sand beyond – complete with ominous buffalo skull –

looks like a desert. Time to move on.

As I'm about to leave, a flash of white announces a squacco heron flying in below me. Might as well take a peek, while I'm here. I raise my binoculars and follow the dapper little frog-hunter as it stalks across the water hyacinth and up onto an old, gnarled log sunk into the mud. It settles down to preen.

Suddenly the log moves. Another log shifts in response, and the heron takes flight as two gaping sets of jaws lunge

upwards. Crocodiles! The combatants sink back down into their primordial gloom, but the scene now has my full attention. Piecing together glimpses of scale and tail I can make out at least six crocs – and something else: a spiral of horn. Some poor kudu has met a grisly end.

Now I'm fully focused on the gruesome gathering. So much so that I almost miss a klipspringer that materialises on a rhyolite outcrop right in front of the hide, close enough to see myself reflected in its dark





IN A HIDE, IT'S DIFFERENT. PERHAPS IT'S THE **CONFINEMENT**, THE ENFORCED HUSH, THE SINGLE UNCHANGING WINDOW ON THE WORLD. OR MAYBE IT'S THE LACK OF OPTIONS. EITHER WAY, IT CREATES A MORE INTENSE FOCUS.

**Pooled resources:**

Squacco heron and great egret in croc-infested waters at Matambeni bird hide, Kruger National Park

eye. Holding my breath, I reach for my camera, but the diminutive antelope springs away. Seconds later, a mocking bush-chat alights on the same rock, tail flicking. I snap that instead.

The 'lifeless landscape' now feels like a stage set crackling with imminent drama. I unpack my lunch and settle in for the show. The next two hours bring a succession of performers. Some appear up close: a nearby branch produces an elusive orange-breasted bush-shrike at point blank. Others are distant: far upstream, stick-figure animals trudge down from the treeline across the sand – baboons, waterbuck, a line of giraffes,

their familiar forms distorted by heat haze.

And the longer I watch, the more I see. A saddle-billed stork that has been working the mud for 20 minutes suddenly hauls out a flapping barbel. A giant plated lizard basking on a rock rotates position incrementally, like the hands of a clock, as the sun moves across the sky. Unconsciously, I'm finding the rhythm of these animals' lives.

The Matambeni hide is one of several that I visit on this trip. At some I get the A-list action: nocturnal viewing from the spot-lit hide at Talamati Camp brings both lion and leopard. At others, the fare is less headline-grabbing but equally enthralling. At the Sweni hide, near Satara, I watch five different dove species establish a puddle pecking order (Namaqua dove, it appears, defers to laughing dove), and follow the painstaking stop-start approach of impala to a pool crammed with crocodiles.

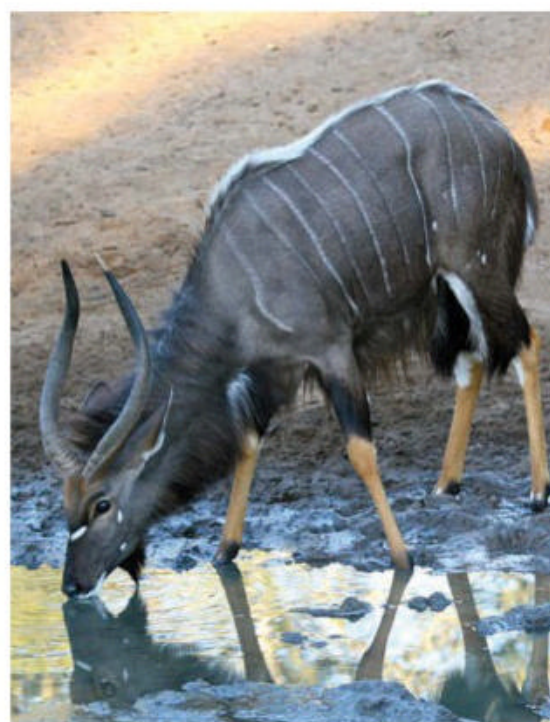
Whatever the hide, the routine is the same: enter quietly, settle down, watch and wait. Then, when something appears, whatever it might be, give it your full attention. There is never nothing to see. If your gaze doesn't focus on an animal, then it finds intriguing details of the backdrop: nibbled thorn twigs; the silken snare of an orb-web spider. And if wildlife isn't immediately visible, it's certainly audible. Sitting in silence, your ears become attuned to the slightest flutter of wings or rustle of foliage.

Using hides is hardly rocket science. You just watch and wait. But it's surprising how seldom on safari we truly commit to that idea. Of course, a game-drive stop at a waterhole offers similar rewards. Then, however, you are generally more visible – and, in a vehicle, the temptation of possibilities elsewhere can trigger restlessness; an urge to move on if there's

'nothing about'. In a hide, it's different. Perhaps it's the confinement, the enforced hush, the single unchanging window on the world. Or maybe it's the lack of options. Either way, it creates a more intense focus.

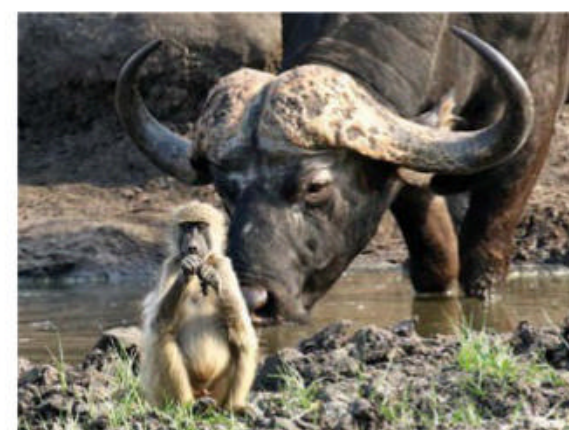
It's all about a change of mind-set. You need to accept that by staying in one place you will miss things elsewhere. This can be hard when you later hear about the pack of wild dogs that were just down the road. But in return you gain something deeper; a chance really to study what's in front of you. Perhaps a herd of elephant will turn up. Perhaps 'just' a flock of guinea fowl. Either way, you will enter their world – and, in the process, forget about yours.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting you spend your whole safari locked in a small wooden box. There's just too much else to see and explore out there in the big, wide, wonderful bush. But try sitting still for a while. You'll be amazed by how exciting it can be. 🦒



**Hide visitors:**

A nyala at Mkhuze; mocking bush-chat at Matambeni, and a baboon ignoring the buffalo at Talamati







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### Close encounters:

The Last Waterhole hide at Mwamba is one of several set up at Shenton Safaris' camps in South Luangwa NP

# HIDES TO SEEK

Hides come in all shapes and sizes. They might be submerged or in trees, rustic or high-tech, sparsely equipped or full of creature comforts. What they have in common is their positioning in locations where wildlife often wanders, usually beside a waterhole, allowing for extraordinary sightings of animals and birds that don't even know you're there. Hides are becoming more common in today's camps. **Here's a small sample:**

## ZAMBIA

Shenton Safaris offer a terrific variety of photographic hides at their Kaingo and Mwamba camps. Snap hippos at eye level from a grass-screened hide carved into the riverbank. Shoot elephants from above in a 'treehouse' hide and capture colourful carmine bee-eaters from a camouflaged boat facing their nesting sites in the sandy banks of the Luangwa.

## SOUTH AFRICA

Zimanga Private Game Reserve is a photographer's dream. Its nine hides were designed by Bence Mate, an award-winning photographer and world authority on hide design. Focusing on different subjects ranging from large mammals to bird baths, from reflections to backdrops of fever-tree forests, they come with high-spec equipment and one-way glass, allowing those inside to remain invisible to their wild subjects.

## NAMIBIA

Andersson's at Ongava, bordering Etosha, is all about gaining a deeper understanding of wildlife, with its own conservationists, a research centre and smart TVs showing its prolific wildlife in real-time at the waterhole. But you can see all these visitors, including rhinos and lions, for yourself from their water-level hide nearby, open day and night.

## KENYA

The sunken hide at Lantorre in the Olkirimatian Conservancy comes complete with air-conditioning, soundproofing, professional lighting – and comfy beds. You may not want to fall asleep, however, with nocturnal sightings that might include striped hyenas and caracal coming to the waterhole.

## ZIMBABWE

The Hide Safari Camp in Hwange has two hides overlooking a busy waterhole. The smaller is disguised as a termite mound and your guide needs to accompany you there. But you can go alone to the larger, mostly submerged hide right on the water's edge – it's reached safely from the lodge by a connecting tunnel, which also houses the wine cellar.

## BOTSWANA

Mashatu Game Reserve has expertly designed hides available for hire, complete with professional photographers as guides and tutors. Birders will love their infinity bird hide while the Matebole Hide lies on an elephant corridor. Other hides are relocated according to conditions, wherever the wildlife is at its photographic best.

## TANZANIA

Hides are a rare feature in Tanzania's camps and lodges, but Sand Rivers Selous in Nyerere National Park is an exception. Their simple hide, complete with cooler box, lies in their 'garden,' built into a tree that overlooks a marsh frequented by myriad birds and wildlife including elephants and giraffes.



ZAMBIA  
PHOTO SAFARI  
SPECIALIST



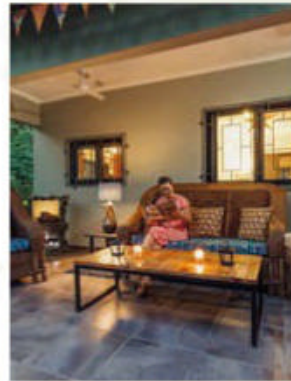
The first time I heard you say, "Let's see what Nature brings us today," I knew that we were in the hands of an accomplished naturalist, not just a photographer. You have the patience to wait and watch the wildlife, and a knowledge of your subjects that lets you anticipate their behavior, and so often be in the right place at the right time, to capture it on camera. During much of my time in Africa, I had a feeling that my guides were a bit too determined to show us that next Big 5 sighting. But on your safari, I always knew that it was about the light, and that whatever animals we encountered, we would have fantastic experiences and come away with wonderful photos.

Michael Thornton, USA



**EDWARD SELFE**  
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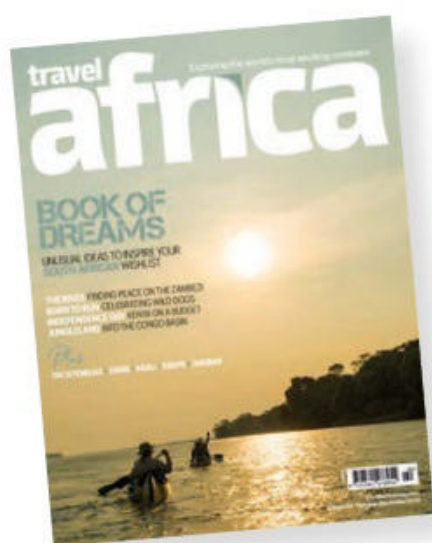




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JOHN LEHR

## STICKY SUBJECT

Once you have found something interesting, it's worth staying with it. Reader **John Lehr** describes his full day following a leopard

**M**y guide, Rati Beula, and I departed Selinda Explorers Camp in northern Botswana at around 5:30am, with boxes full of breakfast foods and beverages so we could stay out as long as we liked. At around 7:30 we found another vehicle with three guests photographing a female leopard resting on the branch of a tree. After 20 minutes of little movement, we headed off to return to an elephant carcass we had visited the day before, but within minutes a call came that the cat was on the move. We made a hasty

return and found her moving stealthily through the bush.

We realised this was an incredible opportunity to observe the leopard at length, so we stayed with her – the only vehicle – for nearly eleven hours, following her through three failed hunts.

Her first effort was to stalk two steenbok. As we watched over the course of an hour or so, Rati talked me through the leopard's strategy: moving from bush to bush as she stalked, sensing wind direction, crouching low, her taut body waiting for the right time to make her move. Eventually she made it to about one metre from the resting antelopes. We saw her pounce, but the steenbok scattered quickly to evade the attack. I had never appreciated how close to its prey a leopard needed to get – and still she failed.

She retreated to the shade of a nearby tree. I was surprised by her heavy breathing and the time it took her to recover. She was clearly fatigued from the strain of the process.

Being an opportunistic hunter, she couldn't resist the arrival of a bachelor herd of impala and, later, a herd of

female impalas. But though she stalked for some time, she never got close enough to strike. Throughout all of this, Rati expertly maneuvered our vehicle to get the best possible view, without disturbing predator or prey.

During the heat of the afternoon, the leopard settled down for a period of extended rest, relocating from time to time to seek shade. She got so comfortable with us that she allowed us to park as near as five metres away. Twice she went under our vehicle and twice she brushed the rear bumper as she passed. We watched quietly, observing her markings, listening to the other animals and birds.

When a group of spurfowls wandered past, she held her pounce position for nearly five minutes, but the birds never came close enough for her to launch. As sunset approached, she climbed a dead tree and surveyed the landscape. Finally, as darkness fell, we decided to return to camp.

I had lost track of time, enthralled throughout the day. Many people return from safari saying they had seen a leopard. I am comfortable saying that I *experienced* a leopard.





**A rare catch:**

Being at the ready meant Marlon du Toit was able to photograph this caracal hunting a flamingo while still appreciating the once-in-a-lifetime nature of the experience



MARLON DU TOIT





# PICTURE THE MOMENTS

Professional wildlife photographers spend more time in the bush than most. So what advice would they give us safari-goers looking to enjoy great wildlife sightings – without the camera being a distraction? We asked one of the best:

**Marlon du Toit**

When watching wildlife, do you choose to pick up your camera or just enjoy being in the moment? What if you could do both?

Every year, I host safaris to wonderful places where wildlife viewing is always at its best, such as the Great Migration or Mana Pools. Those guests without cameras almost always carry binoculars. They enjoy simply watching – they soak it in and save it to memory, perhaps capturing a few photos or videos on their phone.

Photographers, on the other hand, tend to spend a lot of time studying the scene through a viewfinder while scrolling through the camera menu. It's a different experience, but equally rewarding. To capture incredible moments in nature and be able to share them with followers across the world is truly special.

But why does it need to be one or the other?

Although I am a professional wildlife photographer, first and foremost I am a lover of nature. I always have binoculars at the ready. I listen for alarm calls to help me find the big cats. I look out for footprints. I get out at first light to find lions and leopards active before the sun gets too hot. I wait for the heat of the day to watch elephants cooling off at waterholes. I stay up at

night to listen for the rasping call of a resident leopard. I enjoy all these things far more than sitting behind a camera taking photos all day – that's a by-product of my passion.

To enjoy nature *and* take great photos, the trick is to know your camera gear intimately. You must truly understand aperture, shutter speed, ISO, exposure compensation, metering, noise and more. Only then can you be faster in the field to get the shot. When you know what your settings should be, you can react quicker, endure less frustration adjusting your camera – and still have time to put your camera down to just watch.

So before your next safari, read up on your camera. Photograph your pets. Get to grips with the technical aspects before you depart, and you'll find that you'll enjoy your time in the bush a whole lot more, returning with great memories and impressive photographs.

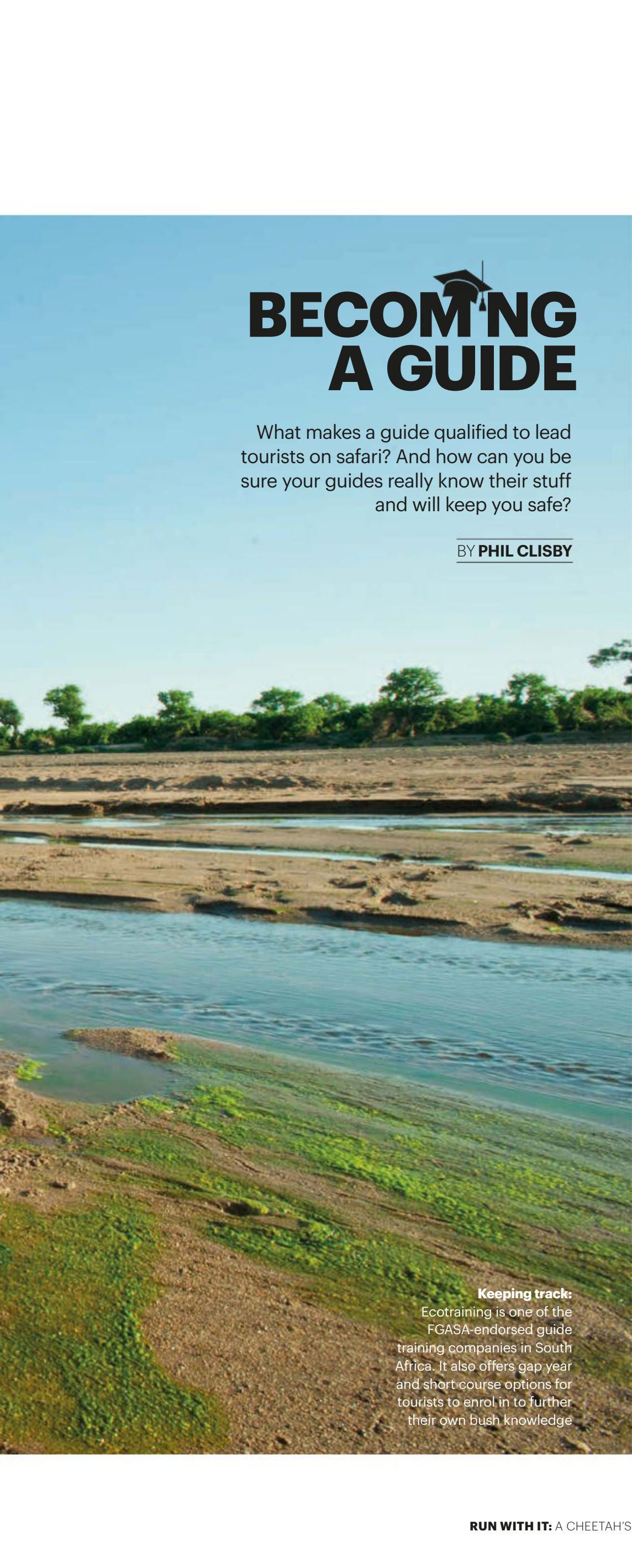
And don't forget to have patience. There's a reason this is mentioned as often as it is. You might catch the action within minutes of arriving on the scene, but that's not typically what happens. Wait it out and you might just be rewarded with a once-in-a-lifetime encounter. If not, you'll still have enjoyed time in the field with the animals that you love. It's a win either way. 🐾





ECOTRAINING





# BECOMING A GUIDE

What makes a guide qualified to lead tourists on safari? And how can you be sure your guides really know their stuff and will keep you safe?

BY **PHIL CLISBY**

**Keeping track:**  
Ecotraining is one of the FGASA-endorsed guide training companies in South Africa. It also offers gap year and short course options for tourists to enrol in to further their own bush knowledge

**D**oes your guide know which carnivore has the strongest jaw? Are they a specialist in your area of interest? Do they know what to do if a buffalo charges? Can they change a tyre in the bush? What if a guest falls ill on a game drive?

The standard of guiding can make or break your trip. Many countries employ a rigorous accreditation of their guides, others less so, but that doesn't necessarily mean the guiding there will be of inferior quality. Most guides will have years of experience and have been mentored by professional guides.

We recommend checking the standard of guiding – and whether your guide specialises in your area of interest – with your tour operator or lodge. If you hire a guide independently, ask to see their accreditation or proof of experience. Word of mouth and traveller forums are also an excellent source of info.

Here's a summary of the system in each prime safari country in East and southern Africa.

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

The Field Guides Association of Southern Africa (FGASA), established in 1990 by a group of professional guides, sets the standard for guiding practice in South Africa, of which there are two grades: Apprentice (Level 1 or NQF2) and Advanced Field Guide (Level 2 or NQF4).

The Level 1 syllabus comprises 17 modules, ranging from mammals, birds and reptiles to weather, astronomy and geology. Students must complete a workbook covering these topics to the required level prior to attempting the exam. To pass, trainees must score at least 75 per cent. They must then conduct an entertaining game drive under the watchful eye of an FGASA assessor.

The journey to Level 2 requires the logging of 260 days of experience before a guide can attempt the exam. This involves a theory test, covering most of the modules at Level 1, but in much greater depth; and a practical assessment, this time with paying guests.

Training is conducted by FGASA endorsed providers such as Ecotraining.

## **NAMIBIA**

To operate legally, guides must hold a qualification from a recognised guide training institution and have field experience. The Namibian Academy of Hospitality and Tourism (NATH) delivers training courses recognised by most potential employers. A Level 3 qualification enables an individual to work as a transfer driver guide or apprentice national guide. Level 4 qualifies you as a national guide. You can then operate extended trips of more than one day across all areas of the country; qualification can take more than 1200 hours of work to complete. NATH also offers courses for those with specific interests. →





ZIMBABWE SETS THE BAR VERY HIGH FOR GUIDING. ITS APPRENTICESHIP-BASED SYSTEM TYPICALLY TAKES THREE TO FIVE YEARS TO COMPLETE

## BOTSWANA

Botswana is a bit of a conundrum, with two guiding bodies: the Botswana Wildlife Training Institute (BWTI) and the Botswana Qualification Authority (BQA).

Operating since 1984, BWTI offers a six-month training course – although most guides self-study or train in-house. The institute also sets a five-part exam, which includes theory, species identification, animal and bird calls, a specimen test (identifying droppings, plants etc) and an assessed guided walk.

Under the BQA – which launched in 2013 with the intention of replacing the BWTI, although that never quite happened – accredited companies like the African Guide Academy train and assess candidates against a set of national standards. The BQA sets a written theory exam – covering guiding principles, flora and fauna, among others – and a practical assessment in an area with potentially dangerous animals.

Passes under both systems afford the trainee an Assistant Guide's licence, allowing them to work in a lodge where there is a fully qualified guide. Once they have two years' experience as an Assistant, they can apply to upgrade to a Professional Guides license.

The African Guide Academy offers their own certificates in higher level and special interest courses as well as additional walking safari training. Although this is not a legal requirement, most operators feel a moral obligation to qualify their guides in this discipline.

## ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe sets the bar very high for guiding. Its apprenticeship-based system, established in the early 1990s and regulated by the Zimbabwe Professional Guides Association (ZPGA), typically takes three to five years to complete.

Once candidates have got a recognised First Aid certificate and passed four exams – firearms, law, habits and habitats, and general knowledge – set by National Parks, they are granted a Learner's Licence and are eligible to secure an apprenticeship with a recognised safari company.

They spend the next two years learning on the job, logging every game drive, safari walk and guiding experience that they undertake. They also need to show competence with a firearm and that they can handle situations with dangerous animals.

Once deemed ready, they must pass a shooting test and a gruelling interview before putting themselves forward for the ZPGA's proficiency test – a week-long exam in the bush, during which they have to set up

a camp and host a set of examiners. They are tested on everything, from trees to birds and mammals, to safety briefings, First Aid, vehicle maintenance, tracking and being able to get their guests out of dangerous situations with game on foot. Only on passing this test will they gain a full guide's licence.

While it is not compulsory for a guide to qualify through ZPGA, those who do will provide a superior quality of guiding to, arguably, anyone else on the continent.

## ZAMBIA

Zambia implemented a national curriculum for guiding in 2016, through the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Authority (Teveta), based on an existing 30-year-old expert guide training programme. (Guides who qualified under the previous system applied to convert to Teveta, to bring them into line with this national accreditation.)

While some operators offer apprenticeships, others employ only qualified guides. Standard practice for an apprenticeship is to work as a spotter or in another hospitality area, where qualified senior guides mentor the trainee. Typically, guides will progress from a transfer driving guide (accredited via an approved course and exam) to a safari driving guide (requiring one year's experience, coursework and exams).

Canoe/boating/angling guides must take a recognised course and practical exam, usually in hippo- and croc-infested water. Walking guides must first be a qualified driving or boating guide, with additional training taking about a year. Plans are afoot to introduce a National Occupational Standard for walking safari guides – which will take around four years to complete.

## MALAWI

While there is no guiding qualification as such in Malawi, respectable operators train their guides to their own exacting standards; often with help from external organisations such as EcoTraining. The would-be guides then hone their skills in the bush under the tutelage of an experienced guide.

You may find some have received a Scout Guide and Wildlife Management certificate from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife. This certifies them to carry a

**Learning to fly:**  
Students participating in the specialist birding course run by the African Guide Academy in Botswana



AFRICAN GUIDE ACADEMY



firearm, in the capacity of an ‘honorary ranger’, enabling them to lead walking safaris.

**TANZANIA**

Although there is no formal guide training system in Tanzania, the country boasts many highly-experienced guides. Some operators have also brought in guides from other countries where formal accreditation is required or have run their own training programmes with external tutors. Many employ their guides and trackers from local communities, who, of course, know the area and wildlife intimately.

The government has mooted that it will introduce a guiding licence programme in the ‘near’ future. But, in the meantime, check your guide’s experience and history.

**KENYA**

Kenya has a reputation for having some of the most experienced and knowledgeable guides in Africa. They’ve had a training system in place since 1996, regulated by the Kenya Professional Safari Guide Association (KPSGA).

Although a voluntary system, the KPSGA programme is extremely thorough and any guide passing through its three levels of certification will certainly know their onions. So, it’s worth asking what level your guide has achieved:

- **Bronze:** candidates must have industry experience or a tourism qualification to sit the exam – a 100-question multiple-choice test, demonstrating a sound knowledge of mammals, birds, plants, culture and more.
- **Silver:** guides must have at least three years in the field at Bronze level and pass an advanced written exam and practical skills assessment.
- **Gold:** guides must have a further three years in the field at Silver level before they can take the exam, which includes

various submissions and vetting before they head to Naivasha for a three-day assessment; the few guides who have attained Gold certification have excellent knowledge of their specialist subject.

**UGANDA**

Uganda boasts some very experienced guides, but when it comes to regulation, it is the new kid on the block, with a recognised standard being launched only last December. The programme comprises three levels:

Level 1 is open to anybody who has attended a course in tourist guiding. Having achieved a pass – following a series of written exams and practical tests – they must gain two years’ field experience before progressing to a Level 2 assessment. A further three years of training and experience are required to reach Level 3.

Previously, companies conducted their own training, but this new compulsory system lays down a national standard. Guides will not receive a Uganda Tourist Board (UTB)-approved licence without passing this assessment. The names of all licenced guides will be published on the Uganda Safari Guides Association and UTB websites. It has yet to be determined how to accredit those who have been working as a guide for several years, so do still ask about your guide’s experience. 🦁

THE **POWER**  
OF THE STORY

BY **SUE WATT**

**Pyramids of Life** is the annual three-week refresher training course for Alex Walker’s Serian guides in Maasai Mara and Serengeti. Guests can take part too – all you need is a strong interest in wildlife. Over five days, our classroom was Mara North Conservancy, our lessons totally unplanned. “It’s an immersive course. We spend all our time in the bush, let situations evolve and learn from them,” trainer Clint Schipper explained. We didn’t just learn about wildlife. There were tips on guiding styles and skills, on interpreting animal behaviour, when to explain and when to simply let guests savour the moment and watch in silence or suspense. I realised how important storytelling is in guiding: giving context to the scenes playing out before you; allowing time for those stories to develop. I remember our stories so clearly: the tiny lion cubs hiding from huge buffalos that would have killed them to protect their future; the jackals goading lions to hunt so they could get the scraps; and sitting in silence in the dark, then hearing the first call of a dawn chorus building to a crescendo as birds gradually joined in, singing their hearts out. We now take more time in the bush and are more inclined to ask our guides to wait a while rather than rush around, recalling Clint’s words to the Serian team: “Let’s just sit and see what happens. It might be nothing. Or it might be a once-in-a-lifetime sighting.”

*Ranger or guide?*

*Rangers and guides share many areas of expertise, and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but actually they refer to quite different professions. Put very simply, rangers look after animals, and guides look after people.*

**Rangers** (or “game rangers”) act as custodians of wildlife and the environment, managing animal populations and dealing with issues such as breeding, population control and diseases, as well as working on practical tasks ranging from maintaining

trails and fences through to managing water resources or dealing with invasive plants. They also play a vital – and often dangerous – role in protecting wildlife from poachers. **Guides**, by contrast, concentrate on connecting visitors

with nature. Many guides are brilliant communicators, with an infectious passion for Africa and its wildlife. All possess the complex skills needed to track and identify wildlife, while they also help bring the bush to life through their ability to decipher details

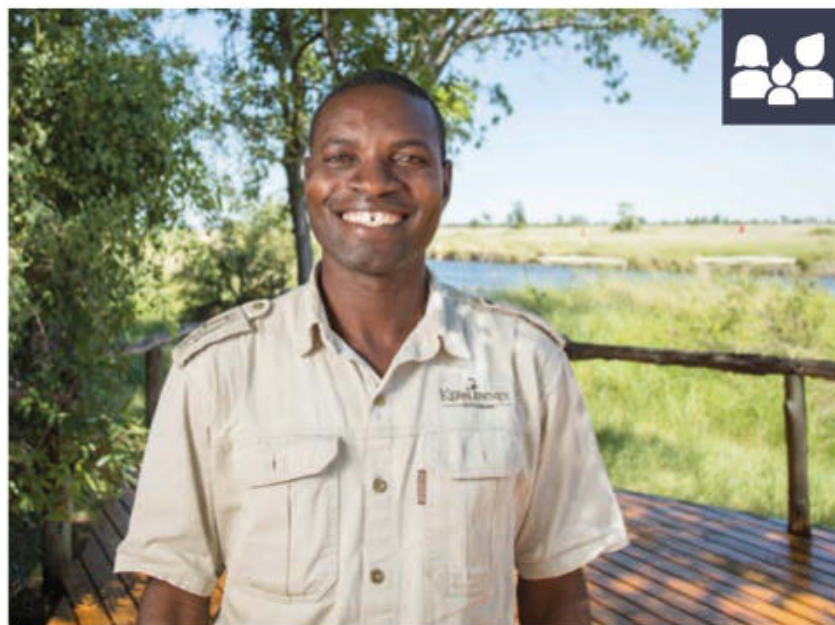
of the landscape which are invisible to the untrained eye. They play a crucial role as frontline wildlife advocates, educating visitors in environmental and conservation issues and inspiring a love of the bush that draws travellers back to Africa time and again.





# HOW GUIDES HELP

Some guides operate in areas of particular specialty which require additional expertise and experience. We asked a sampling to share what they try to do to make your safari special.



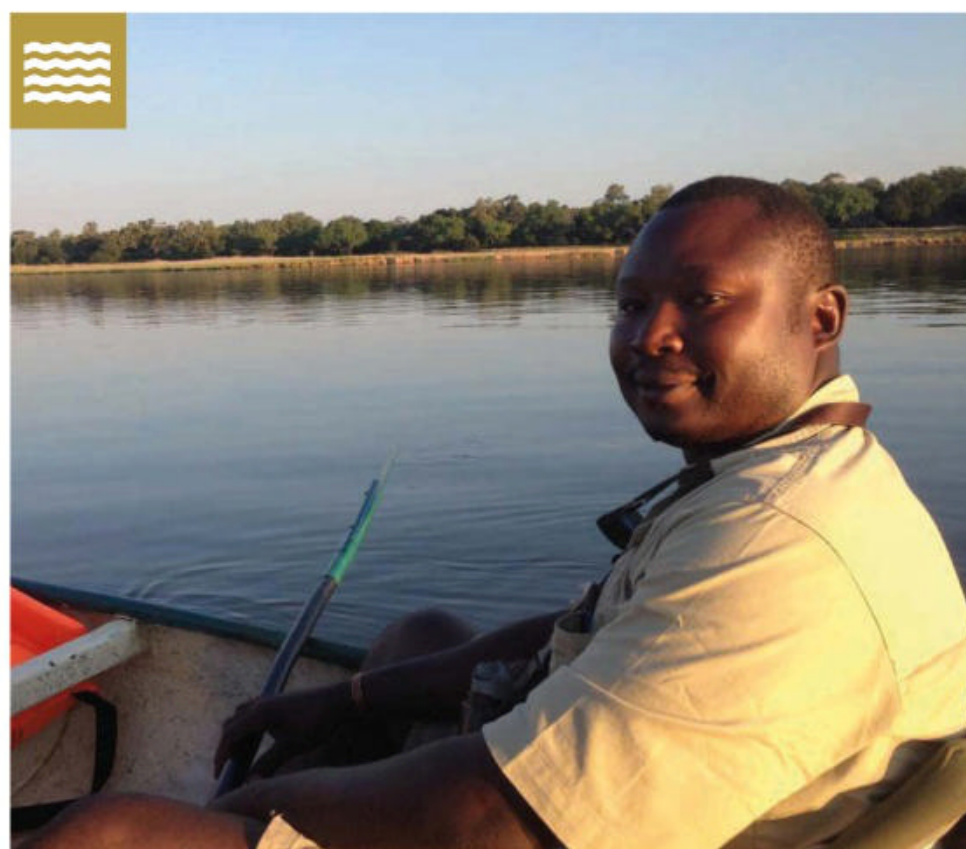
KER & DOWNEY BOTSWANA



TONI HART



ROBIN POPE SAFARIS



HENRY BANDURE





## FAMILY GUIDE

**BAROBI 'ROBBY' GARENAMOTSE**  
KER & DOWNEY  
BOTSWANA

**With our Young Explorers** safaris, the sense of achievement comes from giving the kids the best time they could have imagined, so they will want to come again. We teach the children how to track wildlife, how to recognise animal spoor, identify birds, pole a *mokoro*, drive the game drive vehicle, shoot an air rifle at tin cans and other fun activities such as making animal traps and starting a fire from sticks. Guiding children is so different to guiding adults. You need a lot of patience and a great sense of humour. You need to be aware of where they are, keep them safe and watch their energy levels. You need to always be in control. The best way to engage youngsters is to make it so much fun that they don't realise they are learning. I encourage them to use their senses all the time. We smell flowers, listen for birds, touch animal skulls and cast liquid clay in a lion or hippo track. I know the lessons they learn in the bush will affect their decisions now and later in life. They will be better able to see the bigger picture, to appreciate the smaller things and not focus on only themselves. I understand the privilege I have in this role. I am lucky that although children may not listen to their parents, they do listen to a guide!



## WALKING GUIDE

**KEYALA PHIRI**  
ROBIN POPE  
SAFARIS, ZAMBIA

**When I take guests on a walk**, the focus is on the senses we don't normally use when in the vehicle: touch, hearing, smell and taste. The experience should be about letting the nature unfold and using these senses to bring it to life: following tracks to read the stories the ground has to offer; looking at how nondescript objects fit into the environmental jigsaw puzzle; learning how certain plants can be used. The most crucial part of my job is to keep guests safe, to manage their expectations and set the stage – although the actors can never be predicted. Teaching guests about approaching wildlife is also important: how animals view us as we walk up at a safe distance, their primary detection senses, their body language and reactions to certain stimuli. For instance, an elephant's poor eyesight can allow us to get within 50 metres of them without detection, however if we are upwind they can detect us from over 200 metres. Each walk should be an adventure, taking in guests' interests and expanding their knowledge. It should be about uncovering nature, rather than covering ground. What is so exciting is that no two walks are the same. The experience is like opening Pandora's natural history box.



## RIVER GUIDE

**HENRY BANDURE**  
JEKWE SAFARIS /  
AFRICAN BUSH CAMPS,  
ZIMBABWE

**A canoe safari is such** a unique experience, as you view game from a very different perspective; being on the water allows you to get up close to animals along the river bank. It is fascinating also because guests participate fully in the whole experience. Safety is of course paramount. A detailed briefing is given beforehand, which is the backbone of the whole safari. I lead the canoes in a single file, pointing out potential hazards such as hippos and tree stumps, while also identifying birds and any animals that we see along the way. For one to become a river guide in Zimbabwe, he or she must undergo rigorous training (including advanced First Aid) and complete a thousand hours canoeing on the river.



## DESERT GUIDE

**TONI HART**  
FREELANCE GUIDE,  
NAMIBIA

**The unique landscapes,** cultures and wildlife of Namibia makes guiding here a bit different to other African countries. It's vast, and most visitors travel by road to visit our many attractions, so we take on the dual role of driver-guide. As such, we are national guides, with a good general knowledge of all the various circuits – Central, deep south, South, Namib, Kalahari, North-West, Etosha and the North-East. Each has its own character and we mix them into flowing circuits. There is such diversity of landscape, wildlife, birding and people. No two days have the same colours. Some guides specialise in a specific area of interest such as birding, herpetology, geology or desert-adapted wildlife. There are guides who have created a niche in a particular park or region, or in camping, photography or languages. Most guides have learned on the job, building their experience. And here, in these conditions, that experience, with flexibility, can make all the difference. 🦎





# MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR GUIDE

Relationships are two-way affairs and your guide will feed off you too. There are things you can do to help him or her to make your safari experience as successful as possible.

BY GARTH THOMPSON

Most safari guests will have long fantasised about their forthcoming safari, be they first-time visitors or safari junkies who return whenever they can. An African safari is not an inexpensive venture, and we all want value for our money and for our hopes to be realised. Much of this rests on the guides with whom you will spend so much time.

You will expect bright-eyed, enthusiastic, passionate guides who are not only excellent naturalists but who also relish the prospect of showing you the wonders of their outdoor office. Here's hoping you get a succession of such guides throughout your safari.

Being normal human beings, guides too can suffer from burnout and possibly struggle with disinterest shown by some guests. This is uncommon, but not unheard of. Guides too can have off-days.

So here are some thoughts on how you to get your guide to go that extra mile.

**1 Share your story.** As soon as possible, tell your guide a little of your safari history. This might be your tenth safari in 15 years; you might be on day 18 of a trip which has featured numerous wildlife highlights; or it might be your first ever visit to Africa. Sharing this will help a good guide evaluate what to show you and at what depth to interpret what you see.

**2 Explain your special interests,** be they ornithology, big cats, elephants, trees, astrology, scenery, photography, insects or anything else. Your guide will have a more comprehensive picture of what to focus on.

**3 Admit your fears.** There may be something you are anxious about, or perhaps there was an incident on a previous safari or from your youth that may affect you. Your guide will want to allay your fears and make you feel as safe and comfortable as possible.

**4 Ask questions.** Showing genuine interest will ignite your guide. Guides love guests who really want to learn and discover new things, rather than

just tick a list.

**5 Show emotion,** genuine passion and enthusiasm; laugh; cry, take 1000 frames of photos in an hour; ask to stop and take in a dramatic scene. Your guide will be inspired and motivated by your excitement and appreciative behaviour.

**6 Stay put.** If you are at a sighting you really don't want to leave, tell your guide you don't mind missing lunch or dinner. Many of the top safari camps carry extra munchies in the car for just such an occasion, and some will even bring the meal to you.

**7 Invite your guide for dinner** on your first night so you can find out more about him or her, their family and safari journey. It will strengthen the bond and under most circumstances it will only get stronger as the days pass. Thousands of safari guides have formed lifetime friendships with their guests.

**8 Stay in the moment.** There isn't anything much more debilitating for a guide than to have a guest tapping out WhatsApps or updating Instagram while on a drive. Only use your phone on safari to take

photos, to make notes or look at wildlife apps.

**9 Remember that you are in control.** This is *your* safari and it is *your* holiday. You have worked hard for it, dreamt about it. The staff you meet in camps have joined the hospitality industry – they are there to help realise your dreams – so don't feel you are putting anyone out by asking for a night drive, spending ten hours at one sighting or doing a midday drive (one of the most productive times of day when animals are thirsty and come out for their first drink of the day). Don't feel embarrassed to ask your guide to reduce the amount of chit chat that can occur among guides on the safari vehicle radio, or at least turn it down.

**10** Most of all, like everything in life, **be enthusiastic.** Your positive energy will rub off on everyone you meet, including your guide.

**Employing these small suggestions will go a long way to making your safari extraordinary, and not just ordinary!**



**Earning your stripes:**

On a game drive at Jacks Camp, Makgadikgadi Pan, Botswana

GARTH THOMPSON HAS BEEN GUIDING ACROSS AFRICA FOR OVER 40 YEARS. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF *THE GUIDE'S GUIDE TO GUIDING*



The guides at **Porini Camps in Kenya** stand out as the most knowledgeable, open and friendly that we have encountered. They are all local Maasai, brought up on the conservancies but put through guide training by Gamewatchers Safaris. They delivered superb safaris, shared their experiences, talked openly about their culture and lifestyle, and we could not fault their professionalism.

**JANET PRINCE**, SWITZERLAND

1

**Henry Bandure at Mana Pools**, thanks to his wildlife and social skills... and his great laugh.

**RON VAN DER A**, THE NETHERLANDS

3

**Jabulano Victor Selinda at Baobab Ridge Lodge** in the **Greater Kruger** impressed me with his boundless passion for everything, be it grasses or megafauna. One morning, he asked us to get out of the vehicle, find a spot by ourselves and just sit on the ground for 15 minutes in complete silence, absorbing the sounds of the bush and 'connecting' to it. It was a moving experience I will never forget. **SHARON GILBERT-RIVETT**, SOUTH AFRICA

2

4

A few years ago my wife and I stayed at **Mara Bushtops in Kenya**. **Hassan Kontoma** was our personal guide for four days. There was something special about Hassan. It might have been his complete knowledge of the Maasai Mara, his dignity and approach to life or his willingness to spend each day looking for leopards and cheetahs, but I really believe it was the kindness that always emanated from him. I don't know how you can fit such a huge heart in a man like him. He has become a dear friend.

**JOCK BRADLEY**, USA

## GUIDING STARS

We asked you to give a shout-out to the guides who have enriched your safaris.

**Enos Chimiwi Libesa at Il Moran** in Kenya was our driver on two separate trips and demonstrated an amazing knowledge and ability to find game, coming up trumps on every occasion.

**BEN NEALE**, UK

5

On a photographic tour to **Liuwa Plain in Zambia**, led by Heinrich van den Berg, guide **Innocent Tembo** demonstrated his exquisite knowledge of the destination, the behaviour of the animals and of photography by positioning us perfectly at each sighting. Add to this, he had a great sense of humour. Another excellent guide is **Metal from Desert & Delta Safaris in Botswana**, who went the extra mile for his guests. He even taught me some Setswana, which I still remember. Both are dear friends who I keep in touch with.

**HANNY GREENFIELD**, ISRAEL

6

**David Nganga of Custom Safaris in Kenya** has guided us through every corner of his country for the last decade. He was there for our wedding on the banks of the Mara River, and for our anniversary ten years later. The man is like David Attenborough mixed with Crocodile Dundee, and he mixes the best *dawa* this side of the Rift Valley.

**MICHAEL AND HEATHER TUMMINIO**, USA

7

We were at **Beyond Ngala Camp in the Greater Kruger**, with guide **Tessa** and tracker **Ernest** (Ernie). Ernie had seen lion footprints and decided to follow it up on foot on the basis that we would drive on and meet him at an agreed point. This was repeated, but at the following juncture he directed Tessa straight to the pride. He was pumped, grateful for our faith in him. A great tracker, who knew exactly what he was doing.

**DON MATLOCK**, AUSTRALIA

8

**Stretch Ferreira**, known as the "elephant whisperer", at **Mana Pools** is one of our favourites, along with **Felix from Swala Safaris**, who demonstrated outstanding skills during game-drives in Ndutu, Serengeti and the Ngorongoro Crater.

**GEOFF ANNESLEY-SMITH**, NEW ZEALAND

9

10

**Pietro Luraschi**, who took us on many safaris at **Kwihala Camp in Ruaha**, and **Dennis**, who also guided us at Ruaha. Both have a fantastic knowledge of the bush and can teach you so much about animal behaviour – as well as taking the time to stop and be quiet so that you have a chance to notice the little things.

**ANTONELLA LUPTON**, UK

I formed a particular bond with a guide named **Silvia**, a girl of Italian origin from Windhoek. Thanks to Silvia I saw extraordinary things off the tourist track which I would have otherwise missed, the highlight being a close encounter with two cheetahs, followed by a caracal that passed by at the same moment.

**STEFANIA MANCINI**, SAN MARINO

11

Our guides **Jackson and Gerald** from **Porini Lion Camp** made our safari in the Olare Orok Conservancy in the Greater Mara the most exciting and exhilarating ever. At **Sable Sands** in Zimbabwe's Hwange NP, our guide **Roy** had a special relationship with a herd of elephants in the area; the trust between him and the pachyderms made for a very special experience.

**ANN HILTON**, UK

12





LLOYD CAMP



**Jack of all trades:**

When your game drive vehicle breaks down, your guide becomes mechanic

## ...CONFESSIONS OF **A SAFARI GUIDE**

Most of us will probably admit that, at some point, we've wondered what it must be like to have that 'dream job' of a safari guide, living out in the wilderness among all that wildlife. But what is it *really* like? How do guides view their job and, dare we ask, what do they make of us visitors? To get a glimpse into the life of a guide, we asked **Lloyd Camp** for some honest insights.

**LLOYD CAMP** IS THE AUTHOR OF *AFRICA BITES: SCRAPES AND ESCAPES IN THE AFRICAN BUSH* AND *CONFESSIONS OF AN AFRICAN SAFARI GUIDE: TRUTHS, TALES AND TABOOS OF THE SAFARI LIFE*



guided a teenager once who fell in love with the idea of being a safari guide. Lovely kid. His enthusiasm so impressed me that I arranged an apprenticeship at the game reserve for him. He arrived with new binoculars and a vast library of wildlife reference books. We immediately put him to work in the bar by night and he carried spanners in the workshop by day. During his short breaks he was expected to learn all the local trees, insects, birds and reptiles, as well as the road network from maps. After two weeks he was allowed to drive guests, but only to and from the airstrip just beyond the camp confines. He got very little sleep.

Washing and refuelling the Land Rovers became his routine. In week three he was tasked with chopping leadwood branches to create balcony railings, which generated blisters on both hands, which in turn hindered his ability to wield a spade when it came to clearing a blocked toilet drain. In week four, he resigned in disgust, his dream shattered.

What did he think, that guiding simply involved driving eager clients around in the wilderness, showing them wild animals and pretty birds?

The life of a safari guide, eh?

What goes on in that area hidden from view behind the high split-pole fence with the sign that reads 'Staff only'? You always wonder, don't you: what happens back there to make your safari experience so memorable? What are you not allowed to see, or hear?

Every business has its secrets. They're usually no big deal, just little issues that are rapidly managed, and the client is never the wiser. But you just know that some funny things must go on behind the scenes that the staff won't tell you about because they don't want to shatter the illusion of tranquility and order.

Safari guides sometimes get placed on a pedestal by admiring clients. It is a holiday, after all, a new and stimulating experience, and the guest is in the safe hands of a guide who is the key to unlocking it. Guests almost always lead safe and predictable lives, so they thrill to the relative unpredictability of

ours. They usually do not actually want our lifestyle, but they do want to live it through us for a short while.

But guides are just normal folk like you, actually, doing what they love to do. They too are people of many parts, with insecurities, fears and private agendas. They laugh and they cry and they dissemble. Often, they take themselves far too seriously. They have a good time, but they also sometimes get sad. They gossip about clients, colleagues and the competition. Some guides are sensitive, some are brash and actually believe their

BUT GUIDES ARE JUST NORMAL FOLK LIKE YOU, ACTUALLY, DOING WHAT THEY LOVE TO DO. THEY TOO ARE PEOPLE OF MANY PARTS, WITH INSECURITIES, FEARS AND PRIVATE AGENDAS. THEY LAUGH AND THEY CRY AND THEY DISSEMBLE.

own b\*\*\*s\*\*\*, and some don't even really know why they're there. They simply fell into guiding because they didn't know what else to do; a gap year that became a living.

Who is your guide when he (or she) is not wearing the work-mask? How did he get into this game and why is he still in it? Does he ever grow bored with it, maybe with the guests, and is he fibbing when he says he doesn't? What stories do guides slap their thighs about when they meet at Joe's Beerhouse in Windhoek, or at trade fairs in London, Berlin or Marrakech?

Because this is how it goes. It's a wet and windy day during the rainy season. You wake yourself in the pitch dark, quite possibly with a mild hangover, and bark

your shin on the edge of the bed because the solar lights aren't working as a result of the perpetually brooding skies. There's no water to wash your face with because an elephant has torn the piping out of the ground (again). You splash down to the garage where you find that you have a flat tyre. The hi-lift jack is working for a change, but when you go to the back of the Land Rover to wrestle the spare tyre off, you find it has been nicked by another guide. So, obviously, you steal one from another vehicle, and as you sit in the mud trying to tighten the lug-nuts, the icy water

creeping into your nethers reminds you that the 'waterproof' ponchos are still wet from last evening's drive. Bugger. Well, what can you do, hey?

So, you turn the key of the Landy and lo! Something goes right, and the vehicle starts. This is cause for some jubilation, and you need it, because you just know how unhappy the guests are going to be when you wake them with a forced cheery "good morning, wake-up call!" and they start complaining about the no-water situation. Still, there's always hot coffee to look forward to. Not. Because why? Because, oh, that's right, there's no water in camp. Double bugger.

Your guests pile onto the car in a grey dawn that promises eternal gloom and, making your best attempt to lift their spirits, you chat happily about how important the rain is to the land and its denizens, even while it sluices straight down your neck.

And you drive around a corner, and you instantly remember why it is all worth it. Because, right THERE, you see it! Relishing the dark and damp conditions, that hardest-to-find animal, an aardvark, for goodness sakes! And forever after, you and your delighted guests will recall every moment of that momentous sighting in the brightest of colours. 🦔



LLOYD CAMP





# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SAFARI GUIDE

Guides will tell you that no two days are the same on safari. But to get a feel for their daily routine, we asked **Miraji Gwau** of Lemala Safaris in Tanzania to describe a typical day at work



LEMALA SAFARIS

The day before guests arrive I will make a note of their names, birth dates, dietary and beverage preferences, any special occasions they are celebrating and activities they have booked. This is so important – greeting guests by name and with a welcome drink of their preference goes a long way towards quickly establishing a relationship.

I will also check the vehicle is working as it should, is fuelled and that I have sufficient equipment for the number of guests, including blankets, binoculars and books. If there are photographers in the group, I'll load the camera bean bags. If they are elderly, I make sure the car steps are on board.

I'll check that my uniform is clean and pressed before joining the other guides for dinner – where we share information about the sightings from the day – and then it's early to bed.

Days when we have guests departing and others arriving are always busy.

It's usually a really early start. I have my morning coffee and a quick bite to eat before heading to reception to pick up my departing guests. It's always quite hard to say goodbye, but if my guests are happy, it makes me happy too.

When they have left, I must quickly get the car ready for my new arrivals. After a welcome chat and having sorted the paperwork and park fees for their stay, we're off. During that first drive to camp I

will give them a briefing of the area, keeping the discussion open for guests to ask questions. This is when our bonding begins and it allows me to gauge their expectations.

This is useful for future game drives. I'll look for appropriate points of interest while keeping engaged, talking with them and maintaining eye contact to ensure they feel involved.

At camp, while they are getting used to their surroundings, I will grab some lunch on the go, rearrange the car, load up drinks and snacks for the afternoon game drive and, if I am quick enough and they would like it, I join my guests in the main lounge.

When we spend the full day out on safari, I will have loaded the vehicle in the morning with tables and chairs, a picnic lunch and cooler box full of drinks. I will find a suitable place to set up and serve lunch and drinks, cleaning up thoroughly before continuing with the afternoon game drive.

When we return to camp in the evening, my guests will generally head to their rooms to freshen up. I'll use this time to clean the vehicle, restock the fridge and have a quick shower before joining them for a sundowner. Sometimes they will invite me to join them for dinner, but either way we spend a bit of time deciding what they would like to do the following day – what time they would like to get up, whether they would like to have lunch out on safari or back in camp.

Normally, after bidding them good night I will join my colleagues in the staff canteen and share a traditional home-cooked meal. If there are vehicle maintenance issues to deal with, I'll use this opportunity.

I normally go to bed around 11pm, knowing that my guiding day usually starts between 4.30 and 5am. It's a very long day, but I love my job and wouldn't change a thing.



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# YOUR WILDLIFE-WATCHING HIGHLIGHTS

We asked for your most memorable sightings. And now we are even more desperate to get back on safari!



*Watching a lioness with young cubs stalk and kill a warthog, plus meeting the famous Scarface in February 2014.*

**BEN NEALE, UK**

BEN NEALE (2)

## Right of way ▼

**ILONA STRULL, USA**

**Seeing vast herds of elephants in Botswana, being charged by a bull elephant and watching a pride of lions gorge themselves on an elephant was one highlight. Another was seeing mountain gorillas during a trip to Uganda. We were in camp and walking to a cultural centre, when a gorilla walked up the stairs, passing within a couple of feet of us as we stepped to the side...**



ILONA STRULL

LIN BARRIE



## VIEW TO A KILL

**LIN BARRIE, CHILO SAFARI LODGE, ZIMBABWE** ▲

**As we sat admiring the sunset,** an impala doe bounded past us below the high verandah we sat on. She bounced high in the air, kicking backwards, and immediately we knew something was coming. A wild dog appeared out of nowhere, a streak of lightening. She leaped high and gripped the antelope, tumbling, all gold, tan and black in the dust. Immediately two more wild dogs bounded in and with a brief bellow the impala was doomed.

Stomach contents stripped out and left to the side, they ate fast; twenty minutes and the three very full dogs had finished all the meat. Sated, they began half-heartedly chewing bones and tugging at the twisted carcass as night closed in. After drinking at the waterhole, they faded into the dusk.

Later that night, I heard spotted hyenas chatting and mumbling over the carcass – the stomach must have been a real find for them!

By the morning the skeleton had disappeared (carried away by the hyenas, I presume), but our resident band of merry men – tiny dwarf mongooses – were foraging amongst the shards of bones and meat fragments. Shortly after, they were joined by a family of southern ground hornbills. The youngest chick begged constantly and loudly, and an adult fed it a meaty morsel.

One dramatic wild dog kill had fed and benefitted so many other species. The circle of life.

The following evening, four hyenas returned to the muddy waterhole, galloping around and flopping into the embrace of the warm silt. They entertained themselves for many minutes before moving to a rock pool above, where they drank with smacking lips and loud tongue-lapping before wallowing in the water like tourists in an infinity pool. A hyena spa at the end of a memorable hot September day.



**Heart to art:**  
For more of Lin  
Barrie's work see  
wineandwilddogs.art



*Zebra identity crisis*



*Our first pangolin*

## ◀ **FIVE FINALE** **GEOFF ANNESLEY-SMITH AND** **JILL MATHEW, NEW ZEALAND**

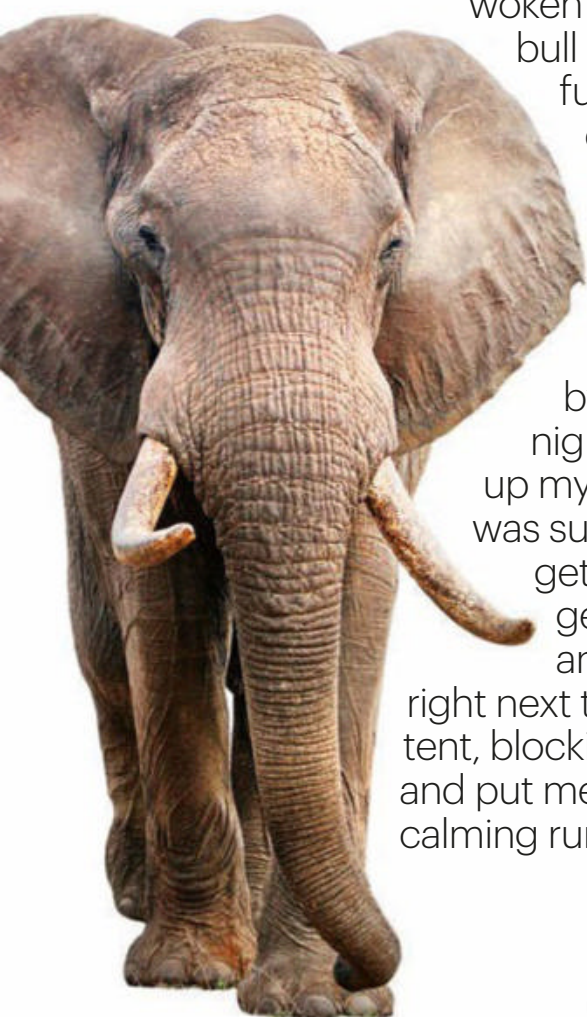
*On our last safari we spent around two months in southern and East Africa. In Namibia we spent three nights at Okonjima (Home of the Africat Foundation), one of our favourite safari stops, where we had our first ever sighting of a pangolin. In the Maasai Mara we caught a glimpse of a rare polka-dotted zebra foal. We ended in Kruger National Park, spotting both roan and sable antelopes before – on our last day – seeing rhino, elephant, buffalo, lion and a leopard. The 'Big Five' in one day, and a fitting finale to our trip.*

GEOFF ANNESLEY-SMITH/JILL MATHEW (2)

## **Where elephants tread ▼**

**KELLIE WHITTAM, AUSTRALIA**

So many of my most memorable moments involve elephants. During a multi-day canoe trip on the Zambezi my friend and I were woken one night by a huge bull elephant. It was a full moon and it was eating from a tree only a few metres from our tent. Once I was late for a game drive because my tent was surrounded by elephants. Another night, a spider crawled up my arm in bed and I was sure I wasn't going to get back to sleep after getting rid of it, but then an elephant stopped right next to the window of my tent, blocking all the moonlight, and put me to sleep with its calming rumbling sounds.



SIMON AND VAL EDLIN

## **Baby steps ▲**

**SIMON AND VAL EDLIN, UK**

**We were in the Matobo Hills National Park in Zimbabwe when the manager offered us a chance to see a six-day-old white rhino, which had been found soon after its birth. The next morning we set off early to meet the guards who**

**took us on foot to see this tiny rhino and its mother. The baby started to walk towards us we stood in awe just a few feet away – fortunately the mother was pretty relaxed. A very special moment; just us, the guide and a guard.** →





# 'THE MAGNIFICENT FIVE'

TONY PROUD, UK ▼

**My heart takes** me back regularly to Kenya and the incredible Maasai Mara, where my passion for safari began over 20 years ago. Wildlife in the Greater Mara is so prolific it is easy to find adventure around every corner. It was on a game drive with my guide Derrick Nabaala from Basecamp Explorer that we found a rare coalition of five male cheetahs, named by the Maasai as *Tano Bora*. I have seen these cheetah hunt on several occasions and they have become so renowned

that many tourists return to the Mara just to see them.

This amazing coalition has survived against all odds for almost five years, despite losing many kills to thieving predators. Recently one of the group left to find a mate in a neighbouring conservancy. After several weeks he returned to re-unite with his brothers, but was rejected and almost killed in a fight with them. Only time will tell if they will once again hunt together, but I do hope to be back to see them before they are gone forever.



KIARIE MATHAGA

CARRIE BURHENN

## Thundering attack ►

CARRIE BURHENN, USA

We were spending two nights at Chitake Springs in Mana Pools National Park – thanks to Covid we had the entire area to ourselves. We had spent the first afternoon photographing the resident pride of thirty lions and the following morning we encountered a very large herd of buffalo headed to the springs, the only water for miles.

We raced back to the springs and our guide, Nick Murray, positioned us about thirty feet up on a bank overlooking the broad, dusty path leading through the far wall to the spring below. The lions were waiting.

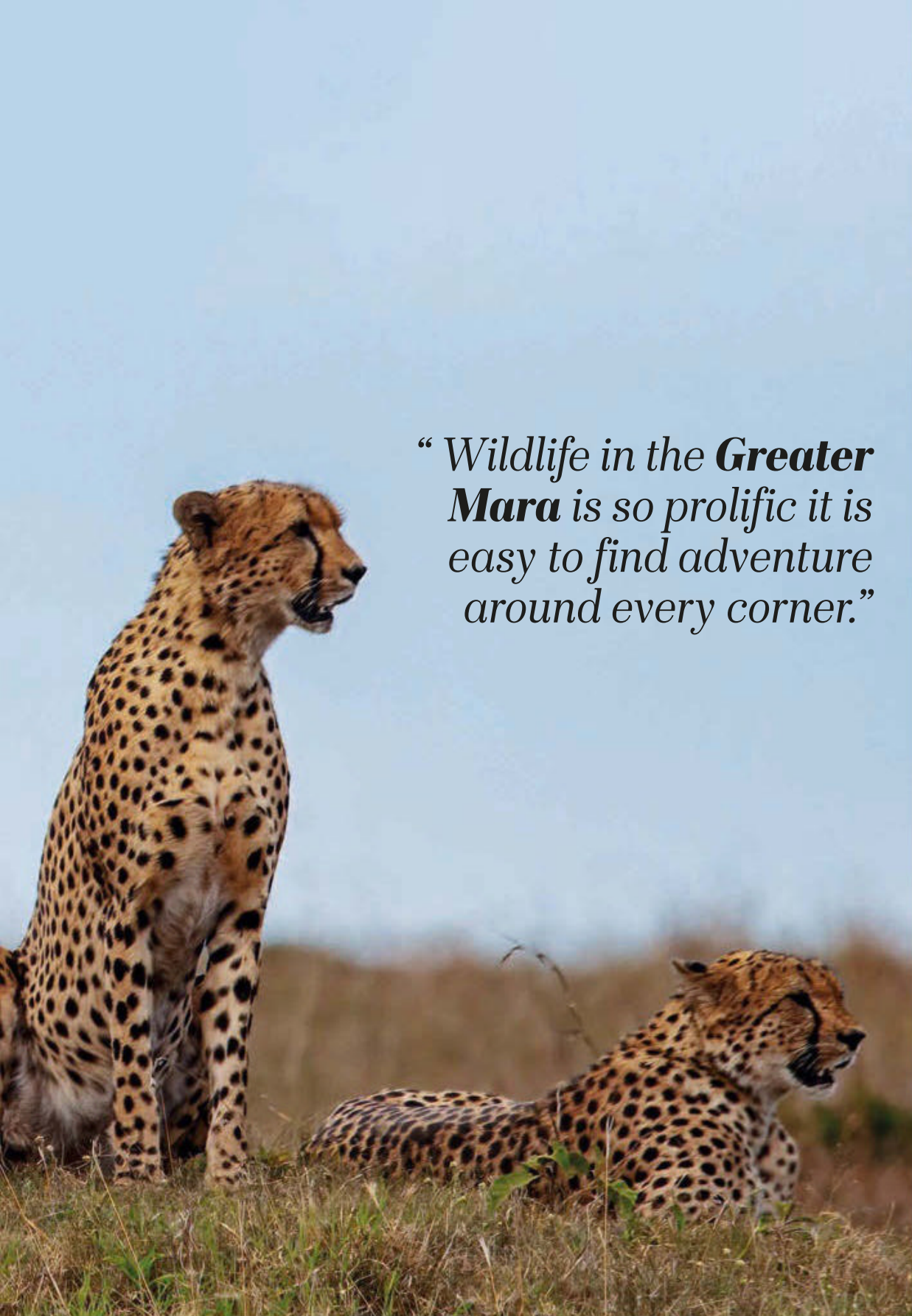
From our vantage point we could see the dust kicked up by the approaching

buffalo, and could make out the dull glint of light reflecting off hundreds of horns. As they approached the water the lions attacked from their rear, driving the buffalo down the steep path to the springs below in a great cloud of red dust. As we watched, a big male lion swept out from the bushes and landed on the back of a buffalo.

The herd kept coming and the dust rose in a great choking cloud through which we could see black bodies hurtling along the ground and splashing in the mud, followed by lions tackling animal after animal. In all, seven buffalo fell that day to the thirty lions. It was all over in less than fifteen minutes.







*“Wildlife in the **Greater Mara** is so prolific it is easy to find adventure around every corner.”*

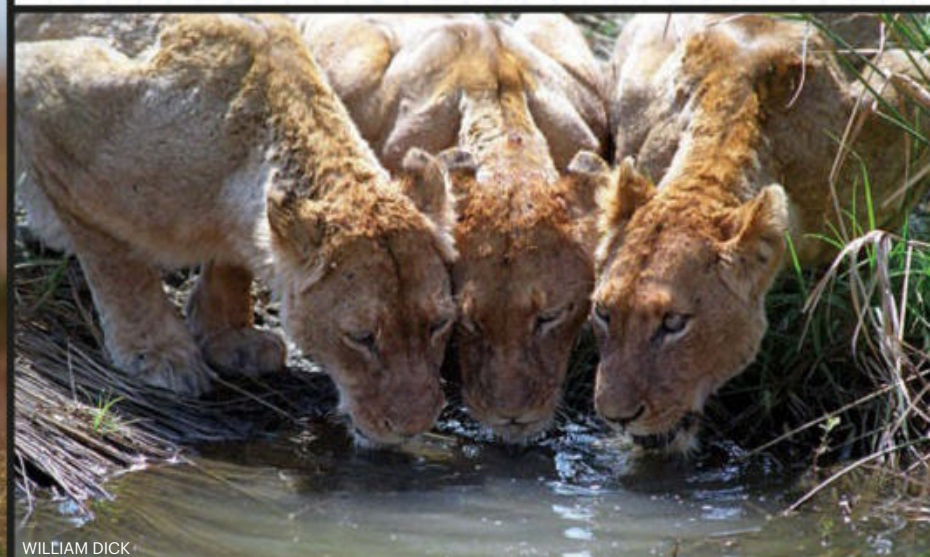
## ***How many genets, exactly?***

**RICHARD HILES, UK**

**On a recent evening game drive** in South Luangwa with Njobvu Safaris, the Chibembe Camp manager Matthews proved his experience by spotting a nigh-on invisible leopard hidden in a tree. At dusk he found a mother and half-grown cub playing in the fading light, and almost as soon as he set up the spotlight he caught a genet in its beam.

Jokingly, I remarked that following earlier rains I expected to see six genets out hunting the resultant insects. As if on cue, we saw a second. Thereafter, with much banter, the focus was completely on finding genets, our only distraction being the sighting of a Mozambique spitting cobra. As we approached camp Matthews spotted our sixteenth and final genet.

Every game drive throws up something to remember it by, but not all are as memorable as this one.



WILLIAM DICK

## **Parting gift ▲**

**WILLIAM DICK, UK**

**It was the end of a** ten-day self-drive trip through the Kruger National Park. I hadn't seen another vehicle for some time and was enjoying the peace and serenity of the bush one last time, when six female lions and three cubs emerged from the bush and walked towards me. When the whole pride had passed

my vehicle, I turned it around and followed them. At the bottom of the incline they began slaking their thirst at a small pool of water just off the road. They didn't seem to mind my presence, just keeping a wary eye on me as I sat watching them from the car – the only person privileged to witness this wonderful scene. 🦁



### **WHAT DOES AFRICA MEAN TO YOU?**

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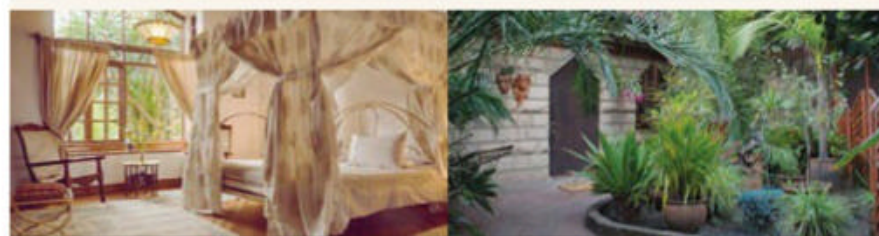
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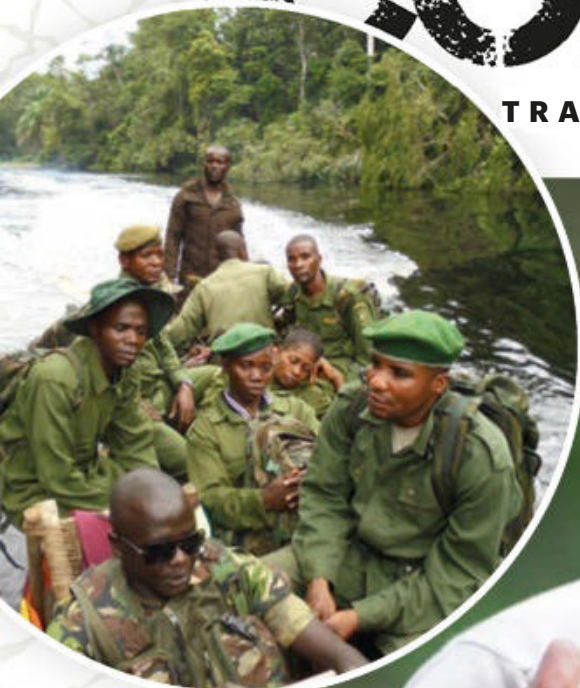


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# CONSERVATION

TRAVEL MATTERS • ETHICAL INTERACTIONS • GREAT PROTECTORS



**Left:** AWF-supported rangers heading out on deployment

CHRISTELLE ILANGA RAMIREZ / AWF

CHERYL-SAMANTHA OWEN / AWF



## AWF@60

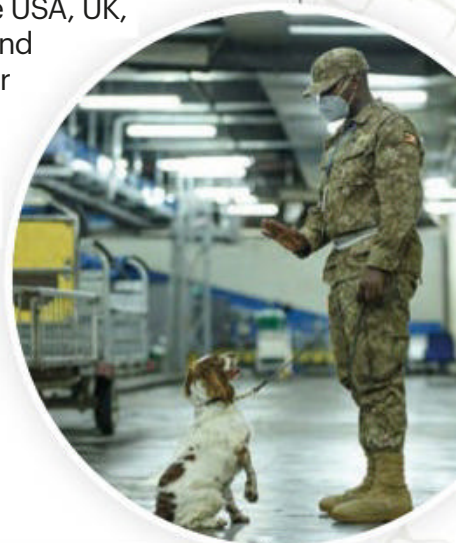
**At Travel Africa we are proud of** our close partnership with the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), which has been at the forefront of conservation in Africa for six decades. Since its formation in 1961, AWF has remained committed “to helping Africa’s governments and people navigate the continent’s rapid development with their magnificent wildlife and wild lands conserved, restored and contributing to sustainable green growth”.

Notable achievements include establishing the Mweka College, the first training school for wildlife and park personnel which has graduated some 9000 students; creating scholarship programmes to develop conservation leaders; pioneering species research, such as with Rwanda’s mountain gorillas, whose numbers have risen to over 1000, and the Amboseli Elephant Research Project; and empowering African youth in wildlife conservation, through its Wildlife Clubs and Classroom Africa initiatives.

Today, AWF employs 250 people working on 16 projects in 10 countries across Africa, with offices also in the USA, UK, China, Belgium and Switzerland. Their work has seldom been more vital.

**WWW.AWF.ORG**

**Left and right**  
AWF’s Canines for Conservation programme trains detection dogs to help fight illegal wildlife trafficking



MARTIN JUMBA / AWF

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**AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION**







# WHY TOURISM IS VITAL FOR CONSERVATION

You travel a long way to watch wildlife in the wild. It's good to know the impact of your trip runs deep.



**H**ow does going on safari play such an important role in conservation? Several reasons spring to mind: the presence of people deters poachers; by reporting wildlife sightings, tourists act as 'researchers'; money that safari-goers spend helps fund conservation initiatives; tourism motivates the protection of habitats and creates employment for local people, enabling workers to support their extended families (and with conservancies, entire communities receive payments). The list goes on...

"There is no doubt that the safari industry has a really positive impact on the way conservation plays out on the continent," says Craig Sholley, senior vice-president of the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF). "The presence of people in the field is a deterrent to poaching, while the income that is generated for local communities and thousands of employees makes a massive difference."

However, the pandemic has seen a dramatic decrease

in all of this. "The consequences are hugely negative," he continues, adding that AWF has had to adapt its use of funds to "make up for not only [the lack of] tourists but also the economic benefits that the safari industry provides".

If the last couple of years living under the cloud of Covid-19 have proved anything, though, it is the positive impact that going on safari has.

"There's no question about it," says Sholley. "I think everybody – countries, conservation organisations, safari operators – is rethinking how things have got to proceed forward. On one level, the impact has been very negative, but on another level, it has sparked some solid creative thinking in terms of what safaris are going to look like in the future, relative to keeping communities involved in conserving wildlife in their backyard. I think the next couple of years are going to portray that creative thinking in a positive way."

Through AWF Safaris, the conservation

organisation offers an array of wildlife-viewing trips, each providing the chance to see AWF's projects in action. While only a small percentage of the price goes to these conservation initiatives, the real benefit of these trips is to get people thinking about how an investment in conservation can make a difference, says Sholley.

The experienced

conservationist, who leads many of the trips himself, cites an extraordinary example: "A couple of years ago, I had a family on safari to see gorillas... I had breakfast with the 90-year-old patriarch and we were talking about AWF's conservation plans in consort with the Rwandan government to expand the boundaries of the national park – and



AWF

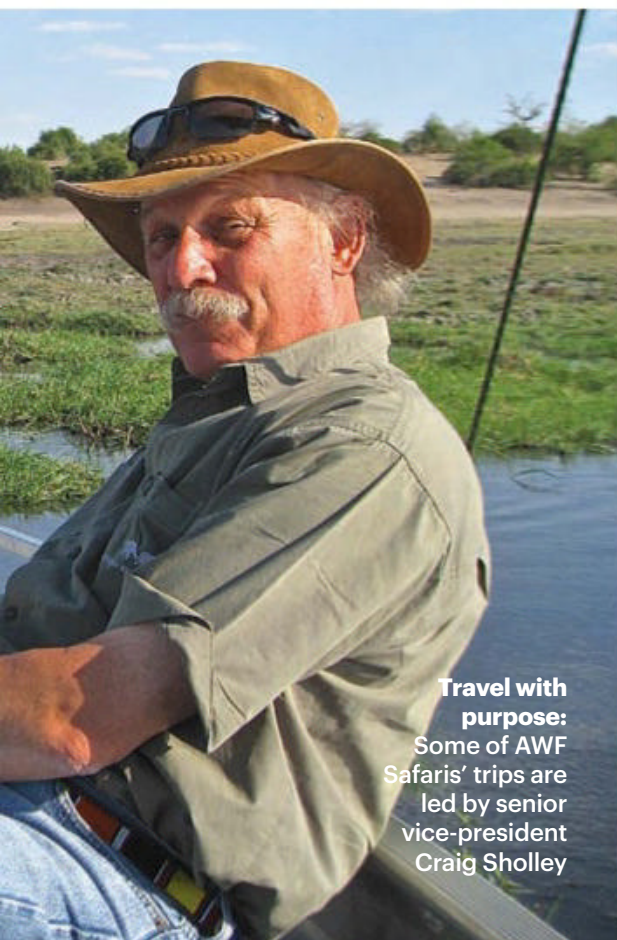


to do so in a manner that was going to create critical gorilla habitat for a growing mountain gorilla population. He committed US\$1m to help expand that project.”

This is, of course, an extreme illustration, but it makes a salient point – tourism feeds conservation, directly and indirectly. Most safari operators and lodges have strong links with conservation initiatives and will be happy to show them to you. Make a point of asking.

As Sholley says, game viewing, coupled with behind-the-scenes glimpses of such projects at work, “ultimately tells a broad conservation story. But it also, hopefully, inspires people to get more involved in conservation directly”.

**Visit [awf.org/safaris](http://awf.org/safaris) for more on AWF Safaris**



**Travel with purpose:** Some of AWF Safaris’ trips are led by senior vice-president Craig Sholley

# ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT

Enthusiastic wildlife-loving tourists are often keen to get as close to animals as possible, whether for the thrill of the intimate experience or to learn more about conservation. But it’s important to understand the impact of your participation before you get involved, says **Ian Michler**

**L**et’s be clear: there is little to no conservation value to breeding and keeping wildlife in commercial captive facilities. Ask any reputable conservation agency, researcher or scientist, and the answer remains a firm no!

Typically, these operations offer a range of tourism activities such as cub petting, walking with lions, riding elephants, viewing and feeding opportunities as well as the more shameful options of canned or captive hunting.

In the words of the African Lion Working Group (ALWG), an IUCN-affiliated body with a membership of over 100 scientists and researchers: “Captive breeding of lions for sport hunting, hunting of captive-bred lion and the associated cub petting industry are not conservation tools. In our opinion they are businesses and outside the remit of the ALWG and should be dealt with accordingly.”

In a similar vein, Dr Marion Garai of the Elephant Specialist Advisory Group says: “It’s high time that people view the elephant for what it is – a highly intelligent, caring, feeling animal that wants to live with its family and be left in peace. We know so much about elephant society emotions and cognition that it is not acceptable any longer to misuse the elephants for human entertainment.”

However, this does not mean there are no examples of captive-bred wildlife being used for conservation purposes. There are. But in these handful of cases they are started and managed by legitimate scientific and conservation entities as long-term projects. All will be well-funded with specific and achievable end goals

or targets and, most importantly, are open to peer-review and scientific scrutiny. In addition, these projects are not open to streams of daily visitors paying to either harass or gawk at the animals.

This also does not mean there are no true wildlife sanctuaries. These will be built and managed with the animals’ welfare uppermost in mind.

Rather than the typical

To this end, the Southern Africa Tourism Services Association (SATSA) undertook a comprehensive assessment in 2019 of how to evaluate captive wildlife attractions and activities. While there will always be some grey area, this excellent study and guide remains the best manual for those trying to navigate choices. (See <https://bit.ly/satsa-ethics>)

And if anyone wants

*Because of all the misinformation out there, it’s vital to do research – and think before you cuddle, walk, ride or shoot*

commercial designs with small symmetrical enclosures and a walkway system that facilitates the efficient flow of paying visitors, they have ample space and the behavioural needs of the animals are given priority. In addition, true sanctuaries do not breed, trade or offer any interactive activities with the wildlife.

Because of all the misinformation out there, it’s vital to do research – and think before you cuddle, walk, ride or shoot.

to volunteer in the wildlife space, seek out conservation-focused agencies such as Wildlife ACT.

As a final word, it’s worth pointing out that in May 2021 the South African government announced their intentions to close down the captive lion breeding industry as well as introducing curbs on the breeding and keeping of elephants and rhino.

**IAN MICHLER** IS A DIRECTOR OF BLOOD LIONS ([BLOODLIONS.ORG](http://BLOODLIONS.ORG))



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# THE GREAT PROTECTORS

How do those working to conserve wildlife feel about their work and the animals they spend so much time with?

## TO PROTECT AND SERVE

AWF rangers share the importance of their role and what they have learnt from watching wildlife

**ERNEST RIGHA**  
*Lumo Conservancy, Kenya*

I enjoy guiding tourists and seeing an increase in wildlife numbers. Animals are beautiful to watch, especially the 'Big Five'; and they provide important educational values about the ecosystem. I have learned that not all animals cause conflict – you can still live with problematic animals by considering their behaviour.



**LOUISA MUGOGORORO**  
*Mana Pools, Zimbabwe*

I am proud that I have broken barriers in a male-dominated field and now act as a role model to fellow females within conservation. Without wildlife there will be a missing link between us humans and how we are connected to nature. I like watching wildlife because of its aesthetic value. The varied wildlife in the Zambezi Valley make it a true African paradise.



**HOMAGE JUBILANT NCUBE**  
*Mana Pools, Zimbabwe*

My job is to conserve biodiversity by conducting anti-poaching patrols, supervising rangers, roads maintenance, guiding, wildlife monitoring and wildlife-related law enforcement. We all have a role in the ecosystem. Predators keep the prey population in check to avoid degradation, scavengers clean the environment, micro-organisms decompose dead matter and recycle nutrients. As such, humans also have a role – to monitor, control and conserve wildlife. If animals can play their part in the ecosystem, how can we, as humans, not do our bit.



**TABITHA MNJALA**  
*Kasigau Wildlife Conservancy, Kenya*

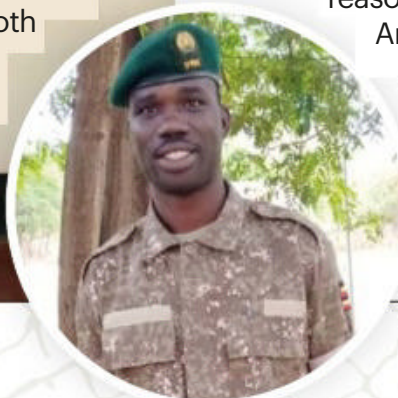
I consider my role to be protecting nature for a better tomorrow. I am fascinated by the natural co-existence of wildlife, migration patterns and the different species' behaviours. From watching wildlife I have learnt about interdependence (both the animals and myself) and mutual friendship.



**JOSEPH OKELLO**  
*Kidepo landscape, Uganda*

My role is mainly to manage wildlife outside of the protected area and to raise conservation awareness among local communities, providing them with knowledge and skills to mitigate human-wildlife conflict. I like wildlife because some are unique, endemic to certain areas, and for historical and cultural reasons such as clan totems.

Animals are just like human beings: they reproduce, care for their young, fear for their lives (at times), adapt to their environment, demarcate their territories and fight for their mates.





## TUSK WINNERS

The 2021 Tusk Conservation Awards shone a light on the inspirational work of leading conservationists across Africa. With the devastating impact of Covid-19, the vulnerability of African wildlife has never been more acute. As Charlie Mayhew, Tusk's chief executive, puts it: "Conservation is not a nice to have. It is a necessity." **Sarah Marshall** caught up with three Award winners.

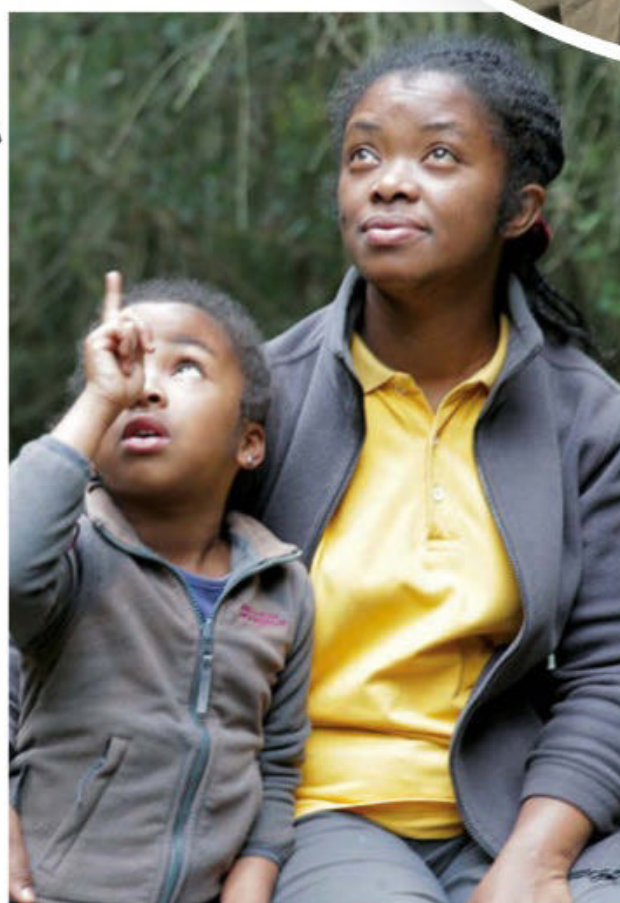


**JULIE RAZAFIMANAHAKA**  
*Executive director, Madagasikara Voakajy (MV), Madagascar*

**WINNER: TUSK AWARD FOR CONSERVATION IN AFRICA**

Razafimanahaka oversees MV's mission to prevent the extinction of Madagascar's endemic species. Her leadership has enabled the organisation to establish seven protected wildlife areas, along with conservation education programmes and a pioneering project to protect the Granddier's baobab tree.

"Watching wildlife is an enjoyable and relaxing experience," she says. "First, you have to find them. Sometimes that's easy, more often it requires perseverance, patience and quietness. These are important characteristics you develop unconsciously. Each observation is unique. Watching wildlife with others is also a sharing experience – someone will always share something you didn't know before."



**SULEIMAN SAIDU**  
*Senior game guard ranger, Yankari Game Reserve, Nigeria*

**WINNER: TUSK WILDLIFE RANGER AWARD**

Saidu organises and leads anti-poaching patrols in Yankari Game Reserve. He also works with local communities to help mitigate human-elephant conflict, monitors elephants, helps with the prosecution of poachers and conducts ranger training and research. The rate of elephant poaching in the reserve has reduced drastically, thanks to the efforts of Saidu and his team.

"I have always been fascinated with wildlife, especially elephants," he says. "I have learnt that elephants are very social and intelligent animals. There is so much to learn from them. When an elephant is injured and cannot move with the group, the herd keep it in a safe location where there is water and they come back from time to time to check on it."

"Yankari is special because it is the best protected area in Nigeria and the only place that you can easily see elephants in the wild. Yankari is also one of only two sites in Nigeria with lions – thanks to the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). With the deployment of satellite collars on the elephants, we are able to provide more focused protection and chase them back whenever they try to destroy crops."

**Visit:** [www.tuskawards.com](http://www.tuskawards.com)

**SIMSON URI-KHOB**  
*CEO, Save the Rhino Trust, Namibia*

**WINNER: PRINCE WILLIAM AWARD FOR CONSERVATION IN AFRICA**

Simson Uri-Khob has worked with Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) for 30 years, leading a team of 43 staff and 60 rangers across 13 conservancies. His work has supported efforts to bring back the desert-adapted black rhino from the brink of extinction.

He insists that rhinos have a gentle heart: "It's a very peaceful animal if you treat it with respect. It's amazing to see these animals wandering around here in in such a big open area. In other places, you might find them fenced in. Here, if they run, they will run forever. Watching wildlife in its natural habitat is very interesting because they have so many ways of interacting and enjoy themselves freely."







# SAFARI PLANNER

Like us all, the travel trade has had a really tough time over the last couple of years. Not all the companies who usually participate in the magazine have been able to do so, but we are listing many of our regular advertisers in addition to those who are reaching out to you in this issue. We are so grateful for all their support over the years, and particularly in these circumstances. We hope that you will prioritise these companies when researching your next safari. Please tell them you saw their advert in *Travel Africa*.

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## LOOK FOR DETAILS

"We often shoot images that are the same as many others out there. If we change our perspective a little it can certainly change the way we see things," says Melanie Cornelius, who won Photographer of the Year and the Abstract category in the Africa Photo Awards 2021 with this shot of a springbok taken in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

"There were other photographers with me, and they were capturing the whole animal in its environment. I waited for him to turn parallel to the vehicle. I loved the lines and the texture of the animal. The way the sun had caught him made for a perfect low-key image and I had the black and white conversion in mind as soon as my finger pressed the trigger. Art is about capturing the attention of our audience for long enough so it can stimulate the viewer."

**To see all winners and learn how to enter the 2022 Africa Photo Awards, visit [www.africaphotoawards.co.za](http://www.africaphotoawards.co.za)**



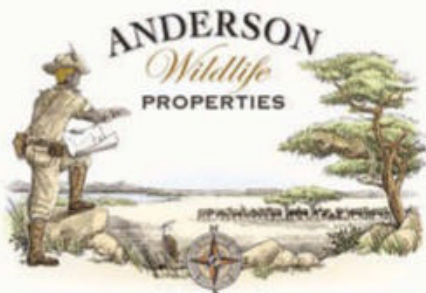


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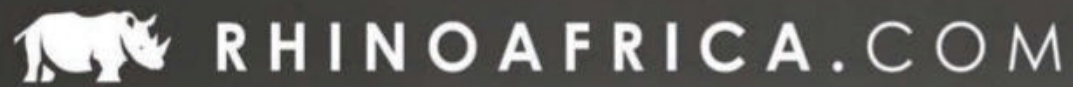
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